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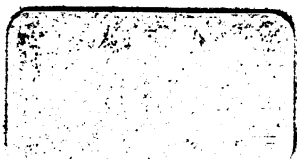
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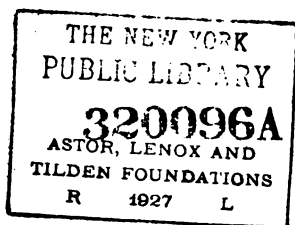
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CONTENTS.

PART I.

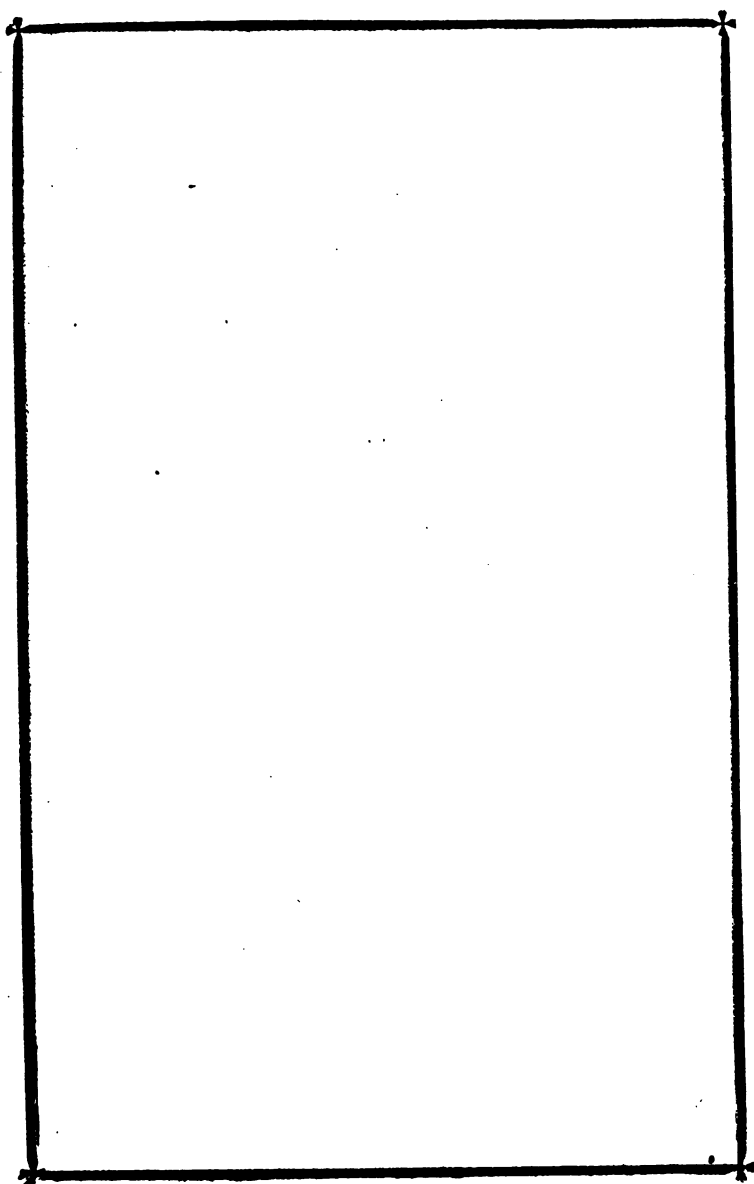
	PAGE
FAITH	7

PART II.

RETRIBUTION.....	52
------------------	----

PART III.

JUSTICE	72
---------------	----





ECCE FEMINA.



PART I.

FAITH.

THERE had never gone up to the rails of a chancel for ordination a class of candidates more highly valued by the church than that which included on the list the name of Edwin Clancy Bowen. They were all men of high culture, of social standing, of unimpeachable character. It was to them that the bishop of a mammoth diocese had alluded when he said that he wished he might ordain a dozen more like them. Among these shining lights the said Mr. Bowen was regarded

as the most promising reinforcement to the church's ministry in the eyes of all who knew him, as well as by his special friends; and when the prelate addressed the hopeful band of recent deacons, on whom he had just laid his consecrating hands, there was more than one in the crowded congregation who fancied that his eye rested on the gentleman aforesaid in a manner that conferred particular distinction.

From the hour that he came down those aisles a stoled and surpliced "priest," up to the fifth year of his ministry, the Rev. Mr. Bowen had gone on without a ripple. He was a man of education, of fine appearance, of good manners, of a very respectable family. His congregation was "strong." He had charge of the chief flock in a city of wealthy people. The church was gothically grand and well upholstered. The foremost pews garnered the aristocracy of the town, and the rear ones were free for stray publicans. This was the church to the erection of which the late General Horser had so nobly contributed. Facing the communion table was the grand slab

erected to his memory, and as the communicants descended from the rails they were confronted by the inscription which rehearsed the general's virtues, and by the big revolver in alto-relief on the marble were reminded of the invaluable service he had done the world. The adjoining slab was vacant. It had been applied for by a man who would have paid much to have his own insignia cut upon it in a shape not much unlike a bowie knife, but he had not amassed sufficient millions to dignify his vulgar sculpture, and the vestry rejected the blazonry. The slab stood vacant—and still waits to commemorate the inventor of that perfection in war machinery which shall blow a million of men at once to atoms, and cancel the cannon as utterly as the cannon extinguishes the fire-cracker. It must be confessed that the Rev. Mr. Bowen did not ascend the pulpit to find himself confronted by the glorification of a pistol on the sacred walls, without a little wincing in the soul, which he could not overcome the first, nor the second, nor yet the twentieth time. But he was too thoroughly a man of the world to let this unpleasantness appear, and

his sermons were most undisturbedly serene in style and polished in delivery.

We have called the son of the church a man of the world. It is no anomaly. True, he never attended theatres or balls, and had renounced all possible secular eminence for the pulpit ; but to the world, so far as the church indorsed it, he stood committed. There were persons in his congregation who had become rich by questionable means. To this wealth, as a fact, Mr. Bowen never dreamed of taking exception. They were mostly Christians—their salvation was tolerably certain—these little matters were between themselves and God. Mr. Bowen drew his large salary, lived in his handsome house, and moved gracefully about the chancel, as well as the drawing-rooms of his parishioners, undisturbed. Certain enthusiasms appeared in the earlier years of his ministry, involving a free translation of the rubrics. It was rumored that he observed extra fasts, that he wore hair-cloth shirts, and that he approved of flowers on the altar. An Ash-Wednesday swoon strengthened the impression of asceticism, and the introduction of choir boys

went to confirm his Ritualistic tendencies. When he had reached his twenty-eighth year, and was still unmarried, it was positively said that he favored the celibacy of the clergy, and this rumor added romance to the interest which the ladies of the congregation felt in his character.

Mr. Bowen did, in truth, find himself growing fond of the doctrine, among the other High Church dogmas. He determined, when fully prepared, to advocate it openly, and had appointed with himself the first Sunday of the coming September for public defence of the principle. This postponement was a necessary one, because it was early summer, and the congregation would be out of town, with the exception of a few poor people, for whom it was not worth while to keep open the church. Also he was going to recruit at a fashionable summer resort, where the waters were celebrated. September, at soonest, should be the time, and during the summer he could prepare a series of sermons to advocate his views, to which he would devote his leisure through the pleasant season.

It was fortunate for Mr. Bowen's consistency that he waited.

At this watering place he found himself among the lions. Added to his reputation for learning and sanctity, added to his very genteel connections, and added to his possession of a large income, and his adoption of a respectable profession in a church almost dead with respectability, were many qualities which led all his female acquaintances to regret the loss of such a man to the gay circles of the world. He was much admired everywhere. He was tall, he had fine eyes, his head was Apollo-like, his dress was Brummelish, and his figure discovered elegancies in keeping with the rest. No stranger who saw him on the way to take his early draught at the springs, with an easy stagey stride, a swinging short cloak, and a jaunty cap, took him for a clergyman, for, unlike his brethren in that political division of the church to which he belonged, he avoided everything that smacked of the cloth. As he was never seen at hop or ball, and could not touch a billiard cue or anything less innocent than a croquet mallet, he was lion-

nized in private parlors and on hotel piazzas, but he was none the less a lion for being caged.

It was on the seventh day of his arrival at the Springs that Mr. Bowen met her.

Her ! He had often heard of her—the lovely young widow—Mrs. Mar. Yet her reputation as a stunning beauty, a late sensation, a magnificent belle, had not prepared him for what he was to meet. He had not sought the acquaintance. It came upon him unawares. He had heard that this dashing and enchanting creature was heterodox, if not an open unbeliever, and it was so unnatural that she should be found among his special clique that he had scarcely thought of her at all. It happened at the close of service one Sunday afternoon. A great thunder-storm was at its height, and groups of anxious ladies were gathered near the church doors, waiting for cloaks and umbrellas. As Mr. Bowen was there exchanging comments on the weather, his friend, Mr. Heyward, prepared him for an introduction, and he looked down at—well, the latest thing in sweet faces. The woman

was a dazzling blonde. One would hardly notice the whiteness of her complexion, for there was no contrast. Her hair and eyebrows were many shades lighter than gold. The eyebrows were less than an arch and more than a curve, and the eyes, deep-set, full and very light blue, had lashes that bent slightly upward. Her mouth drooped a little at the corners, and every changing expression was fascination indeed. Her retirement of manner did not prepare Mr. Bowen for her name. This graceful, shrinking creature, just emerged from girlhood, was Mrs. Mar. Her face, though very beautiful, differing from his ideal, was not the face he liked. For the rest he immediately took exception. As she went off she was too airish. There was a disposition to exaggerate the fashion in her dress, for even though the dress was black it was copiously trimmed, and there was a goodly sprinkling of pearls and diamonds on her hands, and in her ears below the widow's cap. And earrings were a down-right barbarism. They reminded him always of South Sea Islanders. The clergyman did not take to her.

"Why did you not ask her permission to introduce me?" he said to Heyward. "I think she seemed a little displeased."

"*Her* permission," rejoined Heyward. "She requested me to introduce you—been dying for your acquaintance, I hear, ever since she first saw you here. More interested than in any man she has seen on this side the Atlantic."

Bowen ignored this assertion except that his eyes were a little supercilious. "Is she a European importation?" he asked.

"She has been abroad for awhile. Her husband died in Europe. No, she is an American. She never was heard of till her marriage—was poor once, and so a nobody. How do you like her? She's a terrible heretic. You could not employ the season here better than by converting her."

"Isn't she all the time at balls?"

"She is beginning to go. She will be at the great hop next week. Mrs. Rox and she are getting up some half mourning rigs for the occasion."

It seemed that chance threw the lady perpetually in the clergyman's way. There were

relatives of her late husband at the Springs, with many of whom Mr. Bowen was acquainted. He met her at one dinner, and at three evening gatherings, and encountered her frequently about the place. He still did not fancy her. That way she had of shrinking back and lifting those great eyes under their lids and saying nothing—it was a mannerism which he disliked. She hugged a great dog of Col. Rox's one day on the hotel piazza very absurdly, and did many little things that were objectionable. The best manner was strictly negative—nature—no manner at all—so had decreed the authorities; ergo, Mrs. Mar's manner *was* bad. It was unnatural and affected. After a little he withdrew the charge of affectation, but his disapprobation still remained. Their conversation on those rare occasions when they did converse, was strictly general; but those of the ladies who had leisure to observe the quiet by-ways of the watering-place, noted in Mrs. Mar a growing distaste for the gayer side of life at that resort. She actually began to go to church and manifested interest in altar trimmings and laced surplices.

The night of the great hop had arrived. Mr. Bowen on his way to a quiet and informal supper with Col. and Mrs. Rox thought of the fair young widow among the gay throng at the ball-room. He had been seriously revolving Mr. Heyward's suggestion and contemplating the gathering in of this stray sheep to the fold of the true church. Of success, should he undertake it, he doubted not—the only question was the time. If it required all the time he could spare from his sermons on celibacy it would be worth the cost. He considered her wealth, influence and position, and as in seeking the aggrandisement of his church he fell scarcely below the proverbial devotion of a Roman Catholic priest, he decided to devote himself to the task.

With these meditations he reached the cottage of his friend, Col. Rox, when to his surprise the lady whom he had half unconsciously been imagining in gauzy toilette and flashing jewels, whirling about at the hop, stood before him in simple dark dress without ornaments settled as the guest of Mrs. Rox. He was surprised to find how much he had been think-

ing of her. But as Mrs. Rox was her late husband's sister her presence there was explicable. He observed her all the evening from a distance.

There were bouquets to tie up for a fair on the following day, and after supper the ladies tied these bouquets. As there were several bushels of cut flowers this took a long time. The clergyman at the solicitation of his hostess had read a selection from Tennyson's *Maud* to the ladies and then his attentions in Mrs. Mar's vicinity ceased. He did not even look at her for some time, and the lady in spite of her efforts grew pensive and silent. Her fingers listlessly continued their employment, but her eyes from time to time reverted to Bowen, who was in the doorway talking to the Colonel. He was just going apparently, for he was getting ready his street cigar, and his cloak hung on one shoulder. Mrs. Rox said in a low tone to her sister-in-law: "Make him a bouquet, Zoe; he likes violets."

Mrs. Mar picked up a few stray violets and fallen leaves, and fastened them in a little knot. "He's not coming this way," she demurred.

"Throw them to him," urged Mrs. Rox.

"Would you?" hesitated Mrs. Mar. She looked up. Bowen still stood beside Col. Rox, very tall in that doorway, very handsome in that light, and utterly irresistible in such an irreligious looking neck-tie. The little bunch of violets sailed over the lamp to the doorway, but instead of dropping at the clergyman's feet as Mrs. Mar had intended, it struck him full on the heart and fell to the floor.

Mr. Bowen looked toward the group at the table. His eyes rested on Mrs. Mar very keenly, and her color rose high before they were withdrawn. He picked up the violets without remark, said good evening, and carried them off in his button-hole.

The next day he asked his friend Heyward to call with him on Mrs. Mar, and confided to the said Heyward his intention to begin in earnest to bring the fair heretic into the church.

"Good!" commended the layman. "I'll do what I can to aid the consummation. I'll advise her to get up some canonicals—have her interested at once."

"Pshaw! canonicals! Nothing personal." Mr. Bowen proceeded to explain that he objected to the personalities and indeed felt some hesitation in attempting the conversation at all, lest she or some one else might misinterpret his attentions. Religious attentions were the only kind he desired to pay. He wished that there were some way of informing Mrs. Mar that he was not a candidate for matrimony, lest she should mistake him.

"There's no necessity," said Heyward coolly, "Mrs. Mar has objections to marrying a clergyman."

"Has what?" demanded Bowen. "When did she tell you so?"

"Only to-day. We happened to be speaking about it. Now I think of it, we were talking of you. I mentioned that you advocate the celibacy of the clergy."

"I am not committed on that point," said Bowen, a little nettled.

"Indeed! You are drifting there at all events."

"I doubt if I am now. The church has been too much a gleaner after Rome. Let us

sail a course of our own—not follow in the wake of slave ships.”

Heyward actually stared.

“Well, at all events, I told Mrs. Mar that such were your views. I said you would express yourself publicly yet—that the church had no headlong way of doing anything. She agreed with you that the clergy should not marry—said for her own part a clergyman was the last one she should marry.”

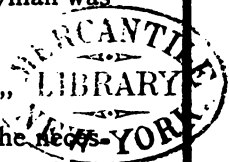
“What reason did she give?”

“I don’t know—that’s all she said.”

“She may never be reduced to the necessity,” said Bowen. “A rich young widow as handsome as she is, can find suitors enough in the world without thinking of the clergy.”

“Her suitors will have to be more disinterested than you imagine. The man who marries Mrs. Mar will not marry a *rich* widow. Mr. Mar provided for that. When she marries again she loses her house in Fifth Avenue and her income. Everything goes to her relatives—Mrs. Rox and Miss Emily Mar, and some nephews and nieces.”

In Mr. Bowen’s mind the probabilities of



Mrs. Mar marrying again were much reduced. He was more than ever resolved to undertake her conversion. It would be a grand thing for the church. Always a single woman, no domestic ties could take her from the things of the Lord, and with her wealth she could have immense effect in churchly work. 'What an aid she would be in his own parish at N— ! And the attack was begun in earnest. That day he called with Mr. Heyward, and the day following without him. Mrs. Mar treated the advance with a sort of mock seriousness at first, but she had to deal with a skilful engineer, who was moreover in deadly earnest. Grave conversation was very becoming to Mr. Bowen, and she had to own very refreshing after the small talk of mere ball-room cavaliers. He discovered almost immediately that with all her worldliness and gayety Mrs. Mar was unhappy, and that she would like to lead a higher life—indeed a useful one. Religiously she was quite unsettled. As a first objection to his creed she advanced the doctrine of hell, which she felt unable to reconcile with the goodness of God. Bowen seemed quite as

much astonished as though he had never heard of such a place in his life, and answered, that that was not a matter that need trouble any Christian. Zoe thought that a lake of fire prepared to consume more than half the human family was not a thing of so small account. Mr. Bowen said theologians differed. It was probably not a fire like the flames of earth—fire was a figurative expression, etc. He seemed a little jovial on the subject. Mrs. Mar being still unable to reconcile divine goodness with the eternal misery of a single soul, Mr. Bowen finally said it was a mystery! She must not expect to understand everything—hardly anything. She could not tell how a blade of grass grew, etc.

There the point rested. Mr Bowen gained her promise not to look again at a mass of Unitarian literature on her bookshelves, and captured the discourses of Theodore Parker, which were too dangerous to be trusted within reach. In place of them he left a prayer-book, and Mrs. Mar promised to study the liturgy. She knew nothing of the Episcopal Church and

conceded that it had a right to be heard. She was quite open in conviction.

Aware of the rapidity with which such conviction often settles in the female mind, Mr. Bowen was surprised to find that this conversion occupied nearly all the term of his stay. But success was an accomplished fact. The lovely Mrs. Mar went from the Springs to New York, her heresies cast off with her black dresses, in full communion with the church of churches, her wealth leaking into its continually yawning coffers, her good deeds multiplying over the columns of its weekly press, and the ladies of her household agitated with every Ritualistic vagary, old and new.

With Bowen's return to town the old routine of sermonizing and catechizing bored him terribly. It was far pleasanter to be making telling conversions and getting people interested in the church. He had reconsidered his views of clerical celibacy and Othello's occupation was gone. No other theme possessed sufficient interest. Sunday passed with its irksome duties, he spent nearly all Monday inditing an epistle to Mrs. Mar, and by Tues-

day he had resolved on going to New York to see her. While packing his valise he studied out the solution of his sudden distaste for his duties and set it all down to his absolute need of an assistant. Not a man—some woman like Zoe Mar. There were women enough in the parish but not one like her. He had felt it all Sunday. There was something lacking in that glowing communion service. He had missed the spotted veils and the diamonds and crosses and late styles at the chancel with an auriferous head bent over the rails. He criticised every one impatiently. Ah! he could never do without her. She would be a queen in his parish at N—. And so he was off for town on Tuesday, and before Tuesday closed he saw her.

She resided in the house of her late husband, at that time well up town. Mr. Bowen knew that an aged aunt lived with her, and that the Roxes were her guests for the winter but he did not care to see them, and made his inquiry accordingly. She soon came and Bowen's whole soul was in his eyes at the reunion. Mrs. Mar was extremely gorgeous in a trailing pink silk ruffled to the waist. The

laces were soft and the crosses resplendent. Mr. Bowen disliked pink and detested trails, but suddenly both became enchanting. After a little he made known the object of his call. He reminded Mrs. Mar that she was untrammelled by ties of any kind, and he proposed that she should become his parishioner at N—and leave town at once for a residence there. He would introduce her among the strong church people and she would find it a grand field for her energies and devotion.

The fair eyebrows arched piquantly. She laughed.

“Take the house with me, Mr. Bowen?”

“No—leave the house to your friends here and come to N— for the winter.”

Mrs. Mar looked at him as though just admitting that he might be in earnest. “Alone? and what would the world say to a proceeding so unaccountable?”

Bowen declared the world to be of no consequence whatever. The last thing he should expect a woman like her to regard was the world! But she need not come alone. Her aunt might come with her.

Mrs. Mar shook her head. She said, growing very pale at the same time, that it gave her great pain to refuse this request, or any request of Mr. Bowen's. She did not like N— as a residence, neither did her aunt. She had lived there once, and the place was the scene of many trials and privations. It was closely associated with a girlhood of poverty and sorrow. She had forsworn the place forever.

Mr. Bowen asked if she would never reconsider that determination. Mrs. Mar said with great decision that she could *never* go to N—to live, and in addition to the reason she had given there was another that she could not give.

Mr. Bowen felt very unhappy at this conclusion. Mrs. Mar made some very polite inquiries relating to his parish, and after walking about the room in an absent way he replied that he detested the place as much as she did. At her request he remained to dinner at six o'clock, when he met the three ladies of the family and Col. Rox. After dinner Col. Rox invited Mr. Bowen to Mrs. Mar's studio. He was quite surprised to learn that she was a

sculptor, and went from one model to another divided between his admiration of her excellence in that art and his doubts whether it was exactly the thing for a woman to do. It was among the unfeminine arts, and clashed with the very rudiments of his conservative education. Mrs. Mar interrupted him while examining some unfinished grape leaves round the brow of the god Bacchus to invite him to accompany the ladies to an evening missionary meeting. He did not leave town that night, but remained to go to matins with Mrs. Mar the next morning at 7 A. M.

The next week the General Convention was to bring him to town among the clerical delegates. The interim seemed almost intolerable. Never had he been so annoyed at the stubbornness of the chief warden—never so outraged by the dictations of the vestrymen. Never had the revolver opposite the cross seemed so utterly disgusting. It was an unspeakable relief to get off to the Convention, where he could meet his more congenial brethren in the church and be solaced with the smiles of Mrs. Mar.

It was on the second day of the sitting of this Convention that Mr. Bowen was surprised by the offer of the place of assistant minister in one of the largest churches in town. The salary was lower by \$1,000 than the one he was then receiving—the dwelling allotted him was less commodious than his house at N—, and farther than that, he would have a master. But it was in New York, near Zoe Mar—there was a chance for him to succeed to the rectorship—as to the masters, where he was he had eight, and his prospective ruler he knew and liked. Mr. Bowen did not hesitate an instant.

In the evening he hied to the Convention, and during the balloting sought out his fair friend in the gallery. He was a little flushed, partly with excitement, partly with wine, for he had just come from the dinner-table of the rector whose assistant No. 3 he was about to become. Mrs. Mar's white veil was thrown back, and her face appeared very girlish and innocent between its pendant crosses. He sat down behind her, hat in hand, and told her that he should leave N— for New York the next fortnight.

"Leave your parish, Mr. Bowen!" She looked amazed.

"There is a vacancy in town, here. Dr. McEachirn wants me as assistant at the Crucifixion."

There was no mistaking the sparkle in her eyes. She said very warmly that it would be perfectly splendid.

"You will not find me backward now in your service," she went on. "I was so sorry to refuse you last week and to withhold the reason. Mysteries are so hateful between friends. I shall go down and rent a pew at the Crucifixion at once—to-morrow. How soon will you come? Sunday?"

"I wish I might say yes. I would like to telegraph my farewell to N—to-morrow, and never go back. But it won't be right to leave precipitately. I shall wait till a week from Sunday."

She looked down and fidgetted with her fan. Bowen's voice was a little lowered and his hat shielded his face from the observers in the aisle as the next words were spoken. "I am anxious to ask you Mrs. Mar, whether a friend

of mine was mistaken in your meaning when he gave it as a statement of yours that you would never marry a clergyman?"

Mrs. Mar flushed and grew pale. She seemed sad, and her lip quivered. Then she replied. "I did say so."

"Do you mean to tell me that your objections still exist?"

"Yes, Mr. Bowen—they will always exist."

Mr. Bowen had changed his parish, but was not resigned to change his profession. He said very nervously: "But good God! what ails us? Look at us below there!" and he glanced at the procession toward the ballot boxes. "Is there a finer body of men in the country?"

"I have a reason."

"Can't you tell me? For heaven's sake let there be no such a mystery between us. I thought we were sworn friends."

"I will tell you," said Zoe, turning impulsively. "I object because the clergy are so far above me! My objections are found in their superior goodness—their exalted and sinless lives—their universal and surprising free-

dom from even petty faults! Marry among the clergy! I should as soon dream, Mr. Bowen, of marrying among the angels of God."

Mr. Bowen's face, if she had dared to look at it, was a study on this declaration. He felt that the illusion was one not impossible to cure. But he only said, "Bless your innocence," and came to order with the rest of the house.

He gave her his arm at the door. It was easier to say the rest under the street lamps than beneath the blaze of church gas. Undaunted by her objections to the clergy, Bowen declared himself unequivocally. She heard him through and answered at last:

"You ask what I must never dream of. There is a great gulf between us—impassable. I can be your faithful servant and such you will find me. I can be nothing else."

Mr. Bowen felt the decision of this reply. He left her with a simple good-night, and she was in doubt whether he was sorry or indignant. This doubt cost her anxious hours all that dreary week, but was relieved when after

the Sunday had passed Mr. Bowen appeared at her door just after his arrival in town on the scene of his new duties.

From that day forward Mrs. Mar was his right hand assistant. She was at church in all weathers, at all seasons, at all times of the day. Never officious but quiet and unobtrusive, she was always ready to obey Bowen's dictation at a moment's notice. She was quite used to be summoned from her prayers before the altar to some conclave of women or clergymen in the vestry-room who wanted her advice or her services. With Bowen she was brought in daily, sometimes hourly contact, and the man's infatuation deepened consequently.

One evening during one of their interviews, for the family seemed to give them a tacit recognition as lovers and left them alone, Bowen asked Zoe to answer seriously whether she loved him.

She looked up and said pointedly, "Too well to marry you."

Bowen pronounced it devilish odd. Zoe was surprised that he trod so near the verge of profanity, and the clergyman repeated his judg-

ment to himself all the way home, and was absolutely tempted to set it down to love of money rather than of him, and declared, much nettled, that she was a mercenary creature.

At all events it was some satisfaction to know that the objections to him applied to every other man, especially every other clergyman, and her heart might remain forever his property in the same negative way.

A crisis in this love affair was reached in Lent. It was during the first days of that sad colored season. The shades of the ladies' dresses at morning service were a reflection of the purple hangings on the altar, and as many as three male communicants appeared in violet neckties and amethyst studs. The clergy themselves were less religious, for the ladies noted over their prayer-books that Mr. Bowen, who had followed Dr. McEachirn with the cup, came out of the church with a spotted cravat under his falling collar, and though concealed with a surplice while behind the chancel rails, it denoted irreverence. This was a little thing against Mr. Bowen, as his gallantry to the widows in the congregation was a great thing.

Mr. Bowen, for his part, passed down the aisle between the rows of purple skirts sticking from the open pew-doors, and despised ostentation from his very soul. He then went up town as usual to the house of Mrs. Mar. All the way up Mr. Bowen's contempt for church colors in crinoline and waistcoats was supreme. When he reached the house he found mauve covers on the chairs and sofas. Screen and footstools were embroidered with bunches of lilacs and violets. There were globes of purple glass on the chandliers, and the window curtains reflected the same sombre hue. When Zoe came down she was in lavender silk, and crosses of cedar-wood were her ornaments. At dinner there it was again in the table-cloth and finger glasses. Mr. Bowen was gradually reconciled to so much High Church upholstery and Ritualistic embroidery, but he told the ladies how much he had disliked it in the pews. Mrs. Mar said she would not presume to defend what one of her pastors condemned, nor did she suppose that there was any vital religion in the color of one's velvets, but these things belonged to religion among the respectable people whom she

knew, and she was only following the fashion. It was certainly no worse to follow the fashions of the church than those of the world.

Mr. Bowen found in the alterations sufficient explanation of Mrs. Mar's absence from church that morning. It was true, Zoe acknowledged, that she had been up half the night completing arrangements. However at evening service she would not fail. She regretted it, and confessed that she would rather have been absent in the evening.

Now, at evening service Mr. Bowen was to preach. It was in aid of the midnight mission, and he had been up all the previous night to prepare his sermon. The other ladies were much interested, but Zoe drew back and said nothing. When addressed by Bowen, and directly challenged she owned her lack of zeal.

As soon as they were alone he renewed the subject. Zoe treated it for some time with silence, and at last answered with nonchalance. It was of all the missions of the church the one in which she felt absolutely no interest at all. Viewed as an agency for reform the Midnight Mission was senseless. Instead of spending

money and effort on such an object the church had better employ it all to some purpose—lodgings for poor girls and decent pay for half-starved seamstresses. As he pressed the matter, Zoe's tone grew excited and highly contemptuous, and Mr. Bowen actually departed half an hour sooner than he had intended.

After a stroll in the park to still his annoyance, he went to look over his sermon with renewed interest, touched it up at intervals and strengthened the expressions. The remembrance of Zoe's scorn made his finger ends tingle. The lamps were lit and the evening bells at the Crucifixion were in full peal before the composition was remodeled to suit him. He got to church too late for the procession and came in through the side door with his surplice on awry, just as Dr. McEachirn began the exhortation, "Dearly beloved brethren," which he said by heart with the book in his hand, looking all about the church, both to lend impressiveness to the charge and to see who was there.

This took him some time, for that evening the church was crowded. It was the first Sun-

day evening in Lent, and as the rush theatrical was a forbidden thing during that season the rush ecclesiastical prevailed. Thin operas through the week and crowded pews on Sunday. Besides being the first Sunday in Lent, Mr. Bowen had been published as the preacher, and he was a fast-growing popular favorite. Zoe was in Mrs. Rox's pew this evening within twelve feet of the pulpit. The speaker found his inspiration nearer than usual. He cast only one glance after ascending the steps in the region of the white veil and cedarwood crosses, before opening his lips to say in the regulation Episcopal monotone :

“ Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, seventh chapter and forty-fourth verse. ‘ And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon : Seest thou this woman ? ’ ”

As the pews were free at evening service, Mrs. Mar had been ordered to occupy the middle place to keep the inside seats for members of the party coming late, but the instructions were forgotten. After raising her eyes at the announcement of the text, she shrank into the corner, assumed an indifferent air,

and surreptitiously opened and shut the clasp of her prayer-book in a manner betokening mingled patience and nervousness. This forgetfulness of her engagements was noted by Emily Rox, who came late, and as her hat was pink and her sister's red, and they were thus obliged to sit together, the chagrin of the two women knew no bounds. Mr. Bowen possessed the indispensable to clerical success, a telling and showy delivery. In this lay the secret of his growing popularity, for in the mouths of ordinary speakers, who had occasionally borrowed his sermons, they were ineffective. Conscious of this capability, he cultivated the extreme refinements of modulation and threw his soul into his accent where soul was an admissible thing on the occasion, so much so, that the clergymen in the stalls behind him looked straight ahead while he preached, and murmured at familiar dinner-tables the great church anathema, "Sensational." As he excelled in the pathetic, the season of Lent gave him his opportunity to soar. It was the only time, except on funeral occasions, when touching sermons were the thing. His sermon on

Good Friday, from the text, "Behold the man," consummated a series of efforts, among which his sermon of to-night stood second on the list in glory. Mr. Bowen, after the first pause, which gave the congregation time for a final rustle and a last cough, opened by a comparison between the differing evangelistic relations, and devoted some minutes to the question whether the several accounts in the Gospel chronicled the same incident. He was inclined to the belief that the difference was greater than the natural disparity between historians of the same event, and in spite of some trifling similarities pronounced that the internal evidences, even more than the discrepancies of time and place went to stamp St. Luke's as the record of a separate transaction. This he did not presume to say as an authority, but supported it by quotations from Scott's Commentary at some length. His position thus established, Mr. Bowen proceeded to ask his "dear brethren" to look, as Jesus bade Simon, at this woman—robbed thus by the unerring lance of Biblical criticism of the surroundings which tradition had given her,—

robbed of brother, sister, home, nativity, of everything but of her place at the feet of the Saviour, and standing a single dark figure without a name, known in the historic Gospel only by the magnitude of her sin and the reciprocal magnitude of her pardon by the Son of God. He portrayed her according to that unlimited liberty of the imagination which is the prerogative of pulpit oratory, first as an innocent maiden in Galilee, wherein as into another Eden, Satan entered; to whom, a second Eve, she listened, and from whom as from the first, he stole her Paradise. Eve was the mother of mankind—this woman was man's nearer relative—his sister. As Adam shared the banishment of Eve, so are all his race involved in the fall of this, her daughter. This woman is at once our victim, our sister—nay, ourselves, in being our weightiest responsibility. She is not to be ignored—she is not to be cast out. Forgotten here, she shall be remembered by us in the judgment. "Often," Mr. Bowen said, "it was true, and he spoke it with reverence, she was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, without the at-

tending shepherds and the offerings of the wise, for she was often more sinless in her sins than those who scorned her—driven by the world's own scourge to the pillar of the world's contempt. Often this woman, whom the congregation are called to contemplate to-night, has had her Gethsemane and her Calvary. Magdalene, with reverence be it said, is mirror of Jesus, for in this world her days eternally reflect his passion in the minor key. The great Sinner and the great Saviour must stand forever in the constellated firmament of the church as the moon to the sun in the material heavens. He is the first-born of the angels—she the highest of the saints, for the majesty of her restoration once accomplished, the absoluteness of Magdalene's devotion gains her this dignity in Heaven, as Mary's purity won for her the immaculate Motherhood. Babylon, queen of darkness on earth, she has become princess of the glorified of God. Woe unto those," and the withering eye of the speaker roved over the congregation, and paused for an instant on the bent head and close knit brow of Mrs. Mar, "who have *dared*

despise this woman. We shall bewail her whom our wrath has crushed in the Day of Him whom our sins have slain. Woe unto those who close the gate against this waiting sister. Admit her in her scarlet raiment and behold it whiter than wool! Woe unto you who would trample her in the dust! You may be glad to follow her in the judgment, going in before you through the Everlasting Doors. Woe unto you who refuse her the first welcome into the courts of the Lord, and the first place at his table, the head of whose order dwells greatest in Paradise. For greater than Peter, or James, or John, at the right hand of Jesus, stands Magdalene, the perfect doer of the Father's will, to whom much was forgiven, and whose love is supreme.

“ ‘Not she with traitorous kiss her Master stung—
Not she denied him with unfaithful tongue.
She, when Apostles fled, could danger brave,
Last at the cross and earliest at the grave.’ ”

Mr. Bowen was hardly disrobed in the vestry-room when Zoe came in. She was the most

brilliant of visions, for her face was scarlet and her eyes gleamed with a certain unusual gayety. After a few words with the other clergy she asked Bowen to lend her his sermon.

"You are the inevitable woman, I observe—it is always somebody—to-night you—who borrows a man's sermon before he can get out of church. You cannot read it, Mrs. Mar. It is all mixed up with pencil marks. What?—is that for me?"

It was a folded fly-leaf she had handed him, and was gone. Mr. Bowen read as follows:

"Come up to-morrow to see me, at ten. Perhaps the gulf between us is not impassable.

"ZOE MAR."

And the next morning at ten, Bowen was punctual.

Zoe appeared almost immediately. She was dressed on this occasion in a yellow silk, cut square in the throat, to accommodate the usual laces. Her ribbons, ruffles and flounces were all dead yellow with slight difference in

the shades. Her headdress was a little vine of gold buttercups, and she wore earrings of topaz. Hair, dress and jewels were all one uncontrasted color.

Mr. Bowen was agitated, and became scarlet and pale by turns. Zoe was calm. The first few words certified that the gulf had become passable, and he listened while Mrs. Mar reminded him in a very practical manner that when she ceased to be Mrs. Mar she ceased to be rich. This Bowen declared a mere nothing—he was impatient at the mention of it. Zoe went on to mention that besides this fact there was another—something she ought to reveal perhaps, but she was not sure. In homage to justice she was ready to tell it. She had carried a sad and painful secret for years, and was now nerving herself to communicate it; and her tremor left no doubt of her emotion.

Mr. Bowen at this felt not a little uneasy. He was aware that Mrs. Mar's parents were nobodies, and that her husband had been a wealthy parvenu. It might be possible there was a stain on her birth. It was only last

week that a highly respectable couple with children grown, had come to him for a private marriage ceremony. If not that, there might be a rascality somewhere. Mr. Bowen was a man of the world, as we have said before. He felt all the disadvantages of being cumbered with secrets of a disagreeable nature, for in case of an unexpected disclosure, to be obliged to say, "I knew it at the time," would be awkward indeed. This angel who sat beside him in butterfly ruffles and dandelion ribbons and with hair like sunset, had some painful memories. It could be no relief to her to tell him—it would only make two parties in the secret.

"Is there any likelihood of the thing coming out, whatever it is?" he asked.

"I cannot tell—sometimes I think the secret forever buried. At other times I imagine it is in imminent danger of disclosure."

Mr. Bowen instantly desired her not to tell him. He really preferred not to know. Nothing she could tell him that was among human possibilities could disturb his affection or alter

her in his eyes. If she had thought so, she little knew the man that loved her, etc.

Zoe drew a sigh of relief at this immunity. Her face grew less sad and her hand ceased to tremble. Mr. Bowen further gave his reasons for desiring her reticence. If it should come to light that he had known any unpleasant secret when he married her, it would injure him vastly in the church, and his influence there was a matter of consequence.

This statement was made freely and as a matter of course. Zoe, fresh in theology, was a little shocked at the worldliness of it, till she recollected that Mr. Bowen's solicitude about his standing in the church was because he was so earnestly engaged in fitting up recruits for heaven, and did not wish anything that concerned him personally to affect that work. Evidently it was the souls he won, not the dollars it brought into the exchequer or the worldly goods he gained, for which he valued his reputation.

When the conversation had lasted for some time longer, Zoe apologized for her request of the evening before. "I learned so much from

your sermon that I wanted to read it over with time."

"I am glad if you can learn charity for the unfortunate of your own sex from any source," said Bowen. "You are as merciless as women in general."

"You think I have such a forbidding fault, and yet are in love with me."

"Love need not make a man a fool. I can't shut my eyes to your treatment of the Midnight Mission. It is wrong. There is no nobler charity in the church."

"My interest may be so deep that you fail to perceive it."

"Fearfully deep, such interest. How many times yesterday did you say 'pshaw' when we spoke of it? I confess it has thrown a dark shade over your character."

"Oh, you misunderstood me!" exclaimed Mrs. Mar. "I disparaged not the work, but the way in which it is done. Come into my studio." And she rose hastily. Bowen followed her to the extension-room, where the morning light shone in on the models, plaster casts and bronzes that adorned her studio.

On the slab between the windows was a model veiled. Zoe threw off the drapery and revealed a female figure chained to the trunk of a blasted tree. The woman's hands were bound behind her and her head thrown back crushed a coronet of thorns into her temples. She was girded by a serpent, with the fangs in her heart. Her bare feet were on a bed of snakes, whose uplifted heads coiled around her. The face expressed neither hope, nor resignation, nor remorse. It was the stupor of a great pain, and that only.

Bowen looked at it a full minute in silence.

"It is a very inconsistent creation," he said.

"The head is that of a goddess, and the features have narrowly missed being grand, but you fail in the expression. How can a creature with such a phrenological warrant for a character have such an utterly lifeless face as that? There's no such woman."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Mar quickly. "This woman has lived in all ages."

"Where?"

"You told us where yourself, last night."

She removed the cloth from the base of the

pedestal where outlined in black pencil marks were the words "ECCE FEMINA."

"It don't apply. She's not a martyr as you have her here."

"And that is your mistake, Mr. Bowen, and the mistake of the church in its Midnight Mission. Martyr, no—but a sufferer notwithstanding—the world's ignored and terrible sufferer. It is because you and the church forget or do not believe that fact that you fail to rescue—your angels cannot search her out. You prescribe repentance and cells for one who is already lacerated unto death, and you insist on saintship and nothing short of it for a being who is the most crushed and wretched of God's creatures."

"We can learn from you—I and the church," said Bowen. Zoe ignored the satire. She busily rearranged the drapery.

"I have already learned from *you*, as I tell you. I have learned that there is some hope among christians of——"

"Charity," suggested Bowen.

"Not that—there is something which in this case is a little superior to charity."

"And that is?"

"Justice."

She replaced the covers in silence, and they left the studio.





PART II.

RETRIBUTION.

THE engagement was known immediately, and it was the nine days' theme among the extensive and aristocratic circle of Christians who rented the front pews at the Church of the Crucifixion. Among the assistant clergymen there, our hero stood highest in the general grace and favor. Of the two other assistants, Mr. Fletcher was too unpretentious a preacher, and made too little of a display as a man, to cause anything but sighs when he ascended the pulpit, and Mr. Fosbrook was too much out of health ever to be seen at that elevation. Mr. Bowen stood among the parishioners at the head of the trio. A sea voyage had been proposed for Mr. Fos-

brook—Mr. Fletcher was content with three tea parties a week, and Dr. McEachirn was only too happy to allow the parish duties to devolve on Mr. Bowen, excepting alone weddings and baptisms. In the course of three short months Bowen had arrived at such a pitch of popularity that his marriage was the greatest event next to his death that could possibly have transpired to stir the pulses of the congregation. They all ran round to look up new patterns in silverware and went to Mrs. Rox assiduously to learn about the bridal ceremonies.

This lady, it was noted, was rather sportive on the occasion, but that was not surprising. She, in common with Mr. Mar's other relatives, had been anxious to see Zoe married again. Still, when the engagement to Bowen was announced, which was in the evening by a note, the Colonel and his wife exchanged looks across the supper-table, and the looks said unspeakable things.

"A clergyman—and an intimate friend of ours!" said the Colonel; "Maria, it's too bad. We can't let it go on."

Maria looked at her rings and said, "Pshaw, let the poor thing alone—she is in love or she never would give up such a property."

They were married at Easter. Mrs. Rox and the Colonel were to play the chief part at the wedding. They were present at the church, but withdrew shortly after the ceremony. The extensive Mar connection had no other representative, but then many of them had never seen Zoe, and too far off to be heirs were not interested. But the congregation of the Crucifixion parish was there with all its neighbors, and the Mars made no gap. It was noticed, however, that they did not come.

Zoe settled very naturally into her new position. Bowen's house was a rather ancient gothic cottage standing farther back from the street than the neighboring more pretentious mansions, but rejoicing in a luxury which they did not possess, a surrounding yard and shade trees, which sheltered it from view of the highway. It had been the original rectory, but with the increasing emoluments of the church, had been abandoned by Dr. McEachirn for a brown-stone front up town, and being disliked

by the other assistants for its location away from the wealthier part of the congregation, which was rapidly moving up town, and actually talking of a new church site, it had naturally fallen to Mr. Bowen. The furniture had served two assistant ministers before, and what was left revealed hard usage. Zoe set about a renovation. As the curtains did not stand taking down, nor the mattings taking up, there was room for energy, and she immediately became very happy in devoting the small balance that lawfully belonged to her from her lately surrendered income in making reinforcements to the linen department and carpeting the floors. The jewellers' stores missed Mrs. Mar's carriage, and the fashionable dressmakers saw her no more, for Mrs. Bowen rode in the street cars like other republicans, and she bought pattern books and altered her dresses into the fashion with her own hands.

"None of the Mars have been here to see you since we were married," remarked Bowen,—"not even Mrs. Rox."

"They have the money now—that is all they want," said Zoe. "We can do very well

without them. We have our church world to attend to."

She had found the church world a pleasant one since her active introduction into it. "Rev. E. C. Bowen" was the open sesame to Episcopalianism everywhere, and the young lady enjoyed that religious free-masonry existing so undefinably in the respectable drawing rooms and nonchalant dinner-tables of that rather exclusive "*persuasion.*" She was in the centre of the circle now—drawn there from the circumference—a circle of so much goodness and loveliness, with no one to make uncharitable remarks if the clergyman's wife wore gay colors at receptions or made models of the heads of heathen gods.

There was one side of her character that developed after her marriage, to Bowen's annoyance. Zoe was very fond of shows. Not only shows in the more favorable sense of the word, as the legitimate drama or refined operatic performances, but circuses, minstrelsy and varieties. She acknowledged that there were many things in the latter to offend her taste, but for the sake of the music, songs and eques-

trian exercises she frequented them, and confessed that there was a certain love of excitement and restlessness in her composition to which they afforded a very comfortable safety valve.

At last when Bowen made an extra strong remonstrance on the subject, which he did amid a heavy cloud from his favorite meerschaum, and just after the trying ordeal of having his study table put in order, Zoe agreed that in consideration of the talk in the parish if she pursued her course of theatre and museum going, to abandon it. Within a week, however, a still weightier annoyance was caused Mr. Bowen by finding her dressing to attend the immersion of a friend who was about to join the Baptists.

“To a Baptist—a—a—schism—shop! And you my wife!”

“I hardly think,” said Zoe, “that any place dedicated to the worship of God, deserves a contemptuous name. Would it injure you to say Baptist Church?”

“Church—of what? Water tanks?”

Zoe retorted with impetus,

"Why not water tanks as well as dinner tables? If you say so, we will agree to call our own a church of dinner tables."

A little coolness, the first since their marriage, arose out of this passage-at-arms. It gradually melted away, however, and the transient rebellion against the faith she had embraced left no trace. She abandoned all diversion seeking, said no more of excursions outside the fold, and settled uncomplainingly into her own sphere, where she was busy enough.

With the advent of a little Bowen, Zoe's visitings in the parish ceased, and even her attendance at church fell off noticeably. She hardly went once a month, and when Bowen spoke of it actually pleaded to stay at home, at least while the baby was so young. This point Bowen was forced to yield.

Months had gone on, and found Zoe's course unaltered. She was noted, as Mr. Bowen frequently said to her pettishly (for he could be pettish at times), for nothing now-a-days so much as for staying at home. It did not matter that she had a crucifix in the closet. He

did not like private oratories. Sometimes these religious privacies smacked of affectation. They were as bad as ostentatious devotions and he disliked both. Let people go to church as a matter of course and then come home and go to dinner sensibly. The baby was large enough now to be left. Could she not trust Mary?

"Yes, perfectly."

Then why not occasionally be seen at church.

Zoe evaded reply, and attacked Bowen for his falling off in zeal. She reminded him of the fondness he had exhibited in former times for church ritual and ceremony—he would never have rebuked any one then for private altars, or recommended "sensible religion" and the dinner table sequence. Zoe pronounced the word "dinner table" with such an advance on her usual scorn that Bowen retreated in silence.

She saw him go with a sigh. "He little knows," she said to herself "how I dread meeting those people from N—. When only it was my own risk I could run it, but now for the baby's sake." Her eyes suffused painfully,

and she turned away to her usual solace—the cradle.

One day when the baby was about fifteen months old Zoe came in from an early communion service in a manner that denoted some excitement. Bowen surprised her over the child, in tears.

“What has happened Zoe?” he asked.

Certain eyes in the congregation which had changed and grown cold—that was all. Zoe did not say so, but took her husband’s hand and looked up imploringly.

“Edwin, let us leave here and go to some cottage in the country.”

“It’s too early in the year yet, Zoe.”

“I mean live there—stay and give up here. You can plough and I do housework, and both be happy.”

Bowen looked at her compassionately.

“What a mad proposition. We ought to be happy enough as it is. You are low-spirited. Take the baby and have a ride.”

And Zoe roused herself to obey the injunction. “It cannot be averted,” she sighed. “It will soon come now.”

The next morning she sat by the nursery window rocking the baby to sleep. Otherwise, she was alone in the room. Shadows on the wall drew her eyes to the gate, and she saw coming up the path three clergymen. She perceived that they were clergymen by the cut of their cloth; as her gaze was prolonged, she recognized Rev. J. D. Fletcher, D. D., Rev. A. K. Sallenlawson, D.D., LL.D., and Rev. Harriman Ackerly Troy, D. D., LL.D., D.C.L. The first of these gentlemen was her husband's associate assistant at the Crucifixion, the second was a noted flowery pulpit orator, but grossly low-church—the third was that sound and exemplary and highly conservative churchman, who had missed, by one vote only, the last election for bishop of his own diocese. Clergymen on that walk were no uncommon spectacle, but this was a remarkable coming of clergymen. They were of a different stripe in politics—high-church, low-church, and middle church—there they came all abreast. Something had produced great unity. They were walking very slowly. Their conversation was grave and there was not a smile in the

company. They had come on business. Messrs. Troy and Sallenlawson were men whom Bowen met at state-dinners or at the Bishop's receptions. They were comparative strangers. Something about them reminded Zoe of the two or three witnesses prescribed in the Scripture. She rose with a shudder. They stood some minutes on the porch before they rang the bell.

Still hushing the child to her breast, Zoe went to her husband's study. Bowen was there—the gentlemen's cards were in with a request to see Mr. Bowen alone on very important business. Bowen sent the girl to invite the gentlemen in. He threw down the pencilled message and slammed his hat and gloves on the table.

"I have come to prepare you," said Zoe tremulously.

"You can't prepare me! My God! I've expected nothing short of it! I've got the appointment to that vacant missionary bishopric across the Mississippi. We've all been quaking a week among the strong parishes. What brings old Troy here but that?—and

Sallenlawson—never comes here except as a tag to the Bishop ! I wish some earthquake would swallow up all of God's footstool west of the Rocky Mountains ! ”

“ Need you go ? ”

“ What can I say ? I'm neither old nor sick nor incompetent. If I say I'd rather stay here than go tagging about the Indian country to be frozen in snow and jolted to death in carts, and finally scalped, and for half the salary I have now, what a howl there would be ! Dr. Troy would cut his throat before he would go himself ! Hang him ! ”

The object of this malediction arrived in the hall door way just after Zoe's retreat through the next portal. Mr. Bowen did not rise for five full seconds, but it took his visitors that amount of time to get in. By that time he had forced a smile, and shook hands all round with due decorum, but the smile was sickly and the hand rather nervous, for Mr. Bowen was not naturally a hypocrite. Yes, it was plainly enough a committee. They sat down like a row of judges. They all hemmed and hawed and looked disturbed. Mr. Fletcher,

most of all, as he was Bowen's personal friend. Fletcher said, "My dear fellow," and Dr. Troy said, "My dear Mr. Bowen," and Mr. Sallenlawson said, "Our dear brother in the Lord," and they all looked like people who had very disagreeable feelings generally.

"We have come here on a very unpleasant errand this morning," Dr. Troy managed to say—"a very painful matter indeed."

Mr. Bowen drew a sigh of relief. This was not the way in which gentlemen and churchmen would announce a promotion to any of their own body. He felt at peace with the Rocky Mountains, nor did the words "bad news," trouble his soul. Something was the matter in the church somewhere. It was not impossible that the Rector was dead. Mr. Bowen's ideas flashed through the consequences—the vacant place—the next election—twelve thousand a year—the control of the church—still he did not wish the suspicion correct. God forbid! He would not admit to himself in the depths of his soul that he had thought of it. He asked, "Is the Rector well?" They all said "yes."

"Then, gentlemen," replied Bowen, "I am all at sea. What is the matter?"

"Mr. Sallenlawson is spokesman," said Fletcher, looking as though he would have changed his location for that of the North Pole.

Mr. Sallenlawson suggested a few words of prayer prior to the communication. Mr. Bowen looked submissively at Dr. Troy, and his eyes twinkled toward Fletcher, whose grave orbs did not respond. Dr. Troy waved away the suggestion by a hasty gesture of the hand and said: "Not at all necessary—much better explain matters at once to Mr. Bowen, as we proposed."

"Then this matter concerns me personally," said Bowen, growing grave.

"It concerns you—it concerns the whole church," said Mr. Sallenlawson. "It is a thing under which the whole body suffers and must continue to suffer through you. It is connected, Mr. Bowen, with your private life—with the very heart of your home—with your marriage relations."

"Well, I am utterly mystified," said Mr.

Bowen. He laid his elbow uneasily on the table, and his coat sleeve shoved up under his wrist-band, and his hair grew very rough under his hand. But he was mystified—that was all. His heart had beaten quicker, but his conscience was as quiescent as a lamb. He looked at the gentlemen in turn. Dr. Troy took a paper from his breast and handed it to Mr. Sallenlawson. That gentleman read aloud at some length. It was a communication from the Bishop to Mr. Bowen, expressing great regret for the terrible scandal that had lately been connected with his name, hoping that Mr. Bowen would recognize the chastening hand of an All-wise Father and bow in submission to His will. The fangs of that deadliest serpent, impurity, had struck him, and through him the church in a most vital point. Let not, however, despair come to the heart of this brother. The church, which he had served so well, would prove his great resource in this dire extremity. Time could ameliorate even an evil so fearful as this, and the recollection might perish with the cause from among the face of men.

Mr. Sallenlawson read with agitation, and much of the letter was incoherent. Mr. Bowen lost the consolatory passages. The matter was no clearer than before.

"This is very extraordinary," he said. "What have I been doing?"

"No blame can attach to *you*, Mr. Bowen," said Fletcher; "nor disgrace; that is, not directly. Of your innocence we are all convinced."

"I mean what do they *say* I have been doing?" insisted Bowen, and he racked his recollection internally. "I have been very careful—or thought myself so. I have hardly looked at a woman unless all the world were standing by. You have all been long enough in the ministry to know what the attacks of church gossips are. Is this anything serious?"

"Very serious," said the spokesman. "Mr. Bowen, this scandal attaches to your wife—not to yourself."

"But, gentlemen," protested Bowen, "nothing can be said against my wife. Her life has been purely domestic—much more so indeed

than was pleasing to me. She has stayed at home and taken care of her child."

They were awful words indeed that fell from Dr. Troy—awful to the husband's ear, gentle as the speaker's commiseration meant to make his terms. "Before you married her,—my dear brother."

"Gentlemen," answered Bowen, indignantly, "if any one has been slandering Mrs. Bowen, we must trace the slander to its source—that is all. Its author is not beneath notice, as the slander has attained such dimensions that the bishop writes to me on the subject."

There was a dead pause. Bowen felt the silence powerfully. He tried again to speak, but it was difficult—there came over him the memory of how Zoe had spoken of a secret—of the mystery that was around her connection with certain persons—of the strange attitude of Mr. Mar's relatives toward her on her second marriage. He looked from one to the other of the three clergymen. He saw in their eyes the sternest of certainties and the kindest of sympathies. His tone changed.

"Gentlemen," he faltered, "what do they say of my wife?"

He looked at Dr. Troy, who answered: "It came to light that Mrs. Mar," (he avoided saying Mrs. Bowen) "had not led such a life as would fit her to be the wife of a clergyman."

"She was a worldly woman, certainly," said Bowen. "That I do not deny."

The three looked at each other. Fletcher and Troy nodded to Sallenlawson.

"Worse, Mr. Bowen. Not only worldly, but a highly criminal woman."

"Is the thing I am to understand neither more nor less than that she was accused of infidelity to Mr. Mar?"

Another pause. The drops stood on Bowen's temples.

"Worse than that. Before her marriage with Mr. Mar," rejoined Mr. Sallenlawson, his voice sinking low and his eyes averted, "Mrs. Bowen was a common woman of the city."

Mr. Bowen gazed at the speaker utterly thunderstruck. For one instant he could not

breathe. Then he moved with the intention to take the Rev. gentleman by the throat and cast him headlong down the staircase. Mr. Sallenlawson did not retreat from him one inch, but Fletcher and Troy rose at once to interfere. At that instant, Zoe, who had been standing close behind the door—not as an eavesdropper, but as an actress in a tragedy waiting for her cue, came before them. Her face was the hue of ashes and she still held the sleeping child in her arms. They all looked at her. She cast down her eyes and said, "It is true."

"It's not true," thundered Bowen. "I don't believe it. Zoe, deny it—deny it—for your life—instantly—it's a damnable lie."

Zoe repeated quickly and firmly, "It is true."

Bowen rushed forward and seized her by the bosom of her dress.

"Give me my child," he said, and tore the infant from her arms. Then he threw her violently back against the door.

"Snake!" with a furious stamp of the foot—"get out of my sight—out of this house."

The room turned blue and swam—Mr. Sal-lenlawson sprang forward and caught the child, and the wretched father fell insensible to the floor.





PART III.

JUSTICE.

IT was well over the parish by that evening. While the reverend committee were closeted with Mr. Bowen, the business on which they had gone was circulating busily, no longer as an uncredited rumor, but as a verified fact. It was a most unheard of thing. The ladies who walked home in couples from morning service, said that such a thing had never been *known* before, with an emphasis that seemed to reflect on Divine Providence for permitting it among the possibilities. Mr. Sallenlawson called at Mr. Fletcher's on the way back to tell the family that Mr. Fletcher could not return to dinner, but had stayed with Mr. Bowen, and he saw

Mrs. Fletcher and her mother and Fletcher's two sisters, Jeannette and Aurelia. They all listened to Mr. Sallenlawson, drawn up in the shady front parlor of their English basement house. They all agreed that it was a terrible thing—very painful mission for Messrs. Sallenlawson, Fletcher and Troy—awful indeed for Mr. Bowen—very unfortunate for the whole church. Only nothing could really hurt the church! They all wanted to know how Mr. Bowen had taken it, very much in the tone in which people who did not go to the funeral ask those who did go how the mourners appeared to feel their affliction. Mr. Sallenlawson thought he had taken it very hard indeed. The ladies all said, "Poor Mr. Bowen," and the worst of it all was his utter helplessness—no redress for the scandal that attached to him—no hope from the law.

"What! no divorce possible?" cried Mrs. Fletcher.

"Nothing of the sort," pronounced Mr. Sallenlawson. "This creature knows how to appear well, and since her marriage nothing can be proved against her. She has taken care of

that. Mr. Bowen is powerless. He cannot even get a separation. The law gives her all the rights of a wife."

Mrs. Fletcher fanned herself and stated that God was higher than the law. Her mother said with spirit: "If I were Mr. Bowen, I would go away with my child where she would never find me. I would ask the Bishop to send me away as a missionary among the Indians."

"The Bishop will help him in something of the sort, undoubtedly," said the clergyman. He and Dr. Troy had agreed on the way down that this affair had killed Mr. Bowen in the church.

Everything that went on under that miserable roof was the affair of the parish before nightfall. It was beyond the domain of ordinary gossip, and sufficient to occupy the most dignified churchman in the diocese for the ensuing nine days or longer. Afternoon service was well attended, and the ladies all took home to their supper-tables the news—that Mrs. Bowen had refused to leave the house! and had told Mr. Fletcher she would stand upon

her legal rights. That Mr. Bowen had then gone to the house of the rector, where he was at present, and that he kept his room and saw nobody.

The speculation among the ladies of the parish was intense, as to what Mr. Bowen was going to do with the child. He could not intend to abandon it to such a mother! Her position in that house would be comfortable indeed. Some hope was extracted from the report that Dr. Troy had left the baby asleep on its father's over-coat, which he had doubled on the study table, and then from Mr. Sallenlawson, who was sure Mr. Bowen had no hesitation about that matter. Miss McEachirn, who had several callers in the course of the day, set everybody at rest with an energetic, "Oh! no, indeed. Mr. Bowen has not left the baby! He brought it when he came here, and one of his servants to take care of it."

This was sufficiently satisfactory.

Fletcher came home, not the person most disconcerted in all the world by that day's proceedings, but certainly not the least so. Fletcher, himself, was not brilliant, and had suffi-

cient sense to be aware of it, and Mr. Bowen's predecessor at the Church of the Crucifixion had been a certain Mr. Malthaus, whom Mr. Fletcher had found seriously obnoxious. The said Malthaus had been very popular in the parish, and with one uncle and two brothers-in-law on the vestry, stood a fair chance to be eventually in the place of Dr. McEachirn. This had been wormwood to Fletcher, but a quarrel between the rector and Mr. Malthaus resulted in the latter's hasty resignation. It was a step immediately regretted by Mr. Malthaus and his friends in the vestry, and Mr. Fletcher, fearing only that it might not be final, used all his influence to have the vacancy supplied without delay by somebody who should be unmistakably superior. It was he who had suggested Mr. Bowen, whom he had known and liked in the Seminary, and he introduced him to Dr. McEachirn as the best possible foil to the memories of Malthaus in the congregation. He had, therefore, watched Bowen's increasing popularity with an exultant eye, and felt that in case of Dr. McEachirn's death or retirement, three men on the vestry

would be powerless to drag Malthaus back. His own small influence over the electors, and Fosbrook's ill-health, would debar either of them from the rector's chair, and to-day it was a serious blow to him to find that Mr. Bowen was so severely crippled as a future candidate. Still he knew the value of time in dissipating impressions, and he had faint hope of a rally.

But he returned to the bosom of his family quite cast-down. His wife and sisters were discussing Zoe's refusal to leave the house, and Fletcher confirmed it as true. He had gone to her to ask when she would have a carriage, and she said, "Not at all." He added that she was behaving very badly. Mr. Bowen had told him (Fletcher) to inform her that he would respect her legal rights, but desired her not to molest him; and after his departure he had sent for the child's clothes, and Mrs. Bowen had refused to give them up. At dinner a note came in which after being read by the family, he sent off to Bowen at Dr. McEachirn's. It read thus :

"REV I. D. FLETCHER.

" DEAR SIR :

"The girl whom Mr. Bowen has with him is unfit to take care of our child. I believe you know where he has gone. Please say to him that I refused just now to send him the baby's clothes because I am going away and he will probably prefer to bring the child back to Mary whom he knows to be more trustworthy. Before this note reaches you I shall be gone, and my husband may rely upon it that I will not return.

"ZOE L. BOWEN."

Long before the delivery of this note to Bowen, the miserable woman had abandoned the house which was home to her no longer. About dark she returned to the vicinity and took shelter in a projection of the opposite building. Here she watched for an hour till a carriage drew up at the gate. Then she recognized Bowen going through it, and Lucy following, while the moonlight shone on a little face in an infant's cap on her shoulder. Zoe stood gazing at the door through which it

vanished like one in a dream. She saw the shades drawn down at the nursery windows, and knew that there was nothing more for her to see of the child that night.

The next day, long before the hour at which Lucy usually took the baby in the park, Zoe was at the fence watching his coming.

But Lucy was late. She had been on an illicit excursion with the child, and so approached from another avenue. Zoe saw the infant as it passed the fountain and the child stretched out its little arms and shouted "Mamma." Zoe pushed aside Lucy and caught the baby in her arms, taking it from the carriage and going up and down the walk like one distracted. The child sprung with delight in her arms, and kissed her repeatedly, and the mother, laughing and crying alternately, talked to it utterly regardless of the benches. "You don't know anything about it, you little darling! Blessed be God, they can't tell *you*. It's Mamma—that's enough for you. Ah! you've got the true love! You'll never send her away from you because

she was bad—no, never in this world, though you should grow a man fifty times over.”

As it grew late she brought him back and buckled him in the carriage with her own hands.

“ You’ll bring him every day ? ” she said to Lucy. Lucy who stood with eyes cast down, and evidently embarrassed at the encounter, said, “ Yes, ma’am,” and wheeled the child away.

The next day Zoe was at the same post, but she waited in vain. The child did not come. It was Saturday, and she waylaid Mary at the evening market and asked, in a voice that was a little husky, for the baby. Mary said that Lucy had reported the incident of the previous day to Mr. Bowen, and had received orders not to go to that park with Eddy any more.

At this Zoe went back to her desolate lodging and brooded.

“ If I had only brought away my clothes,” she said, “ I could sell them and steal my child. And my jewels—why they would have brought a small fortune ! What was I thinking

of to leave them ! Oh ! I was only thinking then of the child and his little smile which I must not have one hour in the day ! Now if I live on bread only and work all the time, I cannot possibly get enough in a whole month to take him away."

On this she brooded and it was her ruling thought. After searching for employment, to which she gave all the hours that remained after her daily glimpse of the child, she found a little embroidery to do.

Meantime, Bowen's life was not an enviable one. Notoriety, the great terror to men of his position and calibre, had come to him through none of his offending. His house, as far as guests were concerned, was like a house of mourning. His ambition had become a mockery, for he felt, by every one's demeanor, and in his own consciousness, that he was as his clerical brethren had rendered it, "killed in the church." The Bishop did not, as Rev. Mr. Sallenlawson had hopefully surmised, see fit to send him to the South Sea Islands, and he walked as erectly as ever in the chancel, and read the prayers as fault-

lessly. Still many thought they saw the change wrought in his soul by suffering, and all the ladies in the church invariably spoke of him as "poor Mr. Bowen," when he passed.

About a fortnight after the disclosure, he received an unpleasant shock by a letter from the vestry requesting his resignation, on the ground that his "usefulness had lately been seriously impaired." He sent the letter without comment to Dr. McEachirn.

The rector was very indignant, and had warm words with the vestry on the injustice of such a proceeding. Mr. Fletcher, still more incensed, went from one to the other, found that generally they had some idea that Mr. Bowen's going away was what people expected, but never would have signed the letter itself except that it had been pressed by three of their number, who thought that the late sensational episode had given an unpleasant notoriety to the congregation, and the church was crowded to the doors on Sundays with a flock of strangers very disagreeably. People standing up and all that sort of thing.

"And that was all the objection," quoth

Fletcher to the rector, "that I could extort from any of them after worrying an hour to get it. This story fills the church! It's not a new offence in Bowen, filling the church. It's just as I thought—those three fellows are at the bottom of it—and the next thing will be to have back that infernal Malthaus!"

To this the rector assented. Fletcher was desperately bent on averting this denouement.

"For God's sake," he said to Bowen, "take no notice of them—they are a parcel of apes—afraid you'll be too popular or notorious as they call it, and they want Malthaus back to empty the church again."

After a week's war between the rector and the three disaffected vestry men, a meeting was called to reconsider the letter to Bowen, and he received a notice that it was recalled.

But it rankled in his soul. The fact that he, suffering and innocent, had been summarily sacrificed to the accident of a public scandal, or as the letter had it, "the disturbance occasioned to all godly minds," was not to be forgotten. In spite of his knowledge of the power of expediency over the minds of his

fellow-churchmen, this manifestation of it was unexpected. He had not thought to be so utterly forsaken—so directly told that he was no longer wanted—so absolutely indebted to the honor and faith of Dr. McEachirn. It depressed and galled him beyond expression.

One evening a little annoyance came to him in the shape of a card brought by an express messenger, on which some clerk had written: "This man has orders to bring Mrs. Zoe L. Bowen's wearing apparel and diamonds from No.— street, immediately."

Rev. Fletcher was at tea with him, and he said: "Find out where she lives, Bowen; you may collect some evidence against her. Dr. Troy said if you only could get a divorce, you so young a man, you could out-live this thing yet."

Bowen shook his head. Fletcher went in the hall and parleyed with the messenger. Mary came for orders. With some difficulty Mr. Bowen inquired where were the clothes and jewels that had belonged to the baby's mother.

Mary said Mrs. Bowen had left them all in

their usual places, but she had since packed them into trunks. She thought it unsafe to send the jewel casket, as many of the jewels were very valuable.

"Bring them down here," said Bowen, and by the time Fletcher came back the gems were arrayed on the tea-table. Bowen looked at them as though the sight gave him pain. Fletcher declared it was too great a risk to send them by the messenger.

"We don't know who he is; perhaps a thief. If he steals these things, you will be held responsible, Bowen, if you own by sending them away that they belong to her. Probably they were all stolen in the first place, and the owners may be looking them up. These women are always in league with pickpockets more or less."

"Send her word," said Bowen, "that Mary can bring the box to-morrow. Where does she live? Did you ask?"

Mr. Fletcher reported that it was a poor quarter of the city—not exactly disreputable, except as poverty was hand-in-hand with vice, but out of date—down town—car line through

it—pawnshops about—two-story and dormer windows above—very old part of the city. House kept by a Mrs. Johnson—could not find out anything more about Mrs. Bowen from the messenger.

“I am afraid she is in need of money,” said Bowen.

“I’m afraid not,” rejoined Fletcher. “If so, she knows how to get it. Don’t be uneasy. She is not enough in want to be in any honest business, for she is strolling in this neighborhood every day.”

“What!” exclaimed Bowen.

“Keeps about within a few blocks. I have it from good authority. My wife says she makes some pretence of meeting your baby and talking to it when the nurse takes it out.”

Mary, who was leaving the room with the jewel casket, turned at the door, to the astonishment of Fletcher, who always ignored the existence of a domestic in his conversation as that of a being without ears.

“If you’ll excuse me, sir,” she said, with some spirit, “Mrs. Bowen never spoke to the baby after the first time; but it’s true that she

goes to the park and looks at him, a ways off, every day. Mr. Bowen bid Lucy not go to that park any more, but she can't get a park in the city where Mrs. Bowen don't go to look at the baby. I think Lucy had very little to do to tell Mr. Bowen a word about it. As long as he did not know it, it didn't hurt him."

Triumphant in this argument and in the silence of her auditors, Mary could not resist a final thrust.

"I must speak a word for them di'monds, if nobody else will. Mr. Bowen knows good enough that it was Mr. Mar gave her every one of them, and I shouldn't think he'd sit there and hear his wife called a thief without knocking a hole through the man that said it."

"That will do, Mary," pronounced Bowen, and the girl with flushed face and sparkling eyes went off to the nursery.

"That woman is an accomplice of the other," asserted Fletcher. "Dear me, Bowen, how unfortunate you are at every turn. I suppose Mrs. Bowen brought that creature here!"

Bowen felt obliged to defend the innocent. Mary had been ten years in the respectable household of Colonel Rox, and he said so.

As for the girl, she expected nothing else but dismissal. She went to the nursery and began to rock the baby unsteadily. She heard the front door close after Mr. Fletcher, and immediately after, Bowen's step as he came up. He stopped at the door, and Mary thought his eyes unusually stern.

"Where is Lucy?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Tell her when she goes out with Eddy tomorrow to keep him in the back garden; he must not go outside the gate."

This was all, and Mary kissed the child relieved. By the time Bowen was out of hearing, her indignation had kindled and found expression half aloud.

"That man's heart is as hard as a stone gate-post. So it is. Thank God, I'm not sent away from the child. His mother'd go crazy entirely."

Mr. Bowen had just received notice to preach on the ensuing Sunday, and Saturday being

the only day intervening, he was closely in the study. Mary came to the door in the afternoon to say that she had gone to deliver the casket of jewels, but neither Mrs. Bowen nor Mrs. Johnson were in, and after waiting some time for one of them, she had thought best to bring it back again.

"You would not have left it with Mrs. Johnson?" asked Bowen.

"I know her, sir—she was housekeeper for Mr. Mar and Mrs. Bowen, a good many years. She's a Quaker lady, sir."

Bowen went to Fletcher's that evening, but his unfinished sermon forced him to hasten home. Once more in the quiet study, with the shades adjusted and the lights ablaze, he sat down by the table and drew up the papers—then covered his face with his hands, partly to banish the handsome eyes of Miss Aurelia from his memory, partly to compose his nerves after his many recent annoyances. It was never so hard to apply himself to his task. He was so listless and unsettled.

He was roused from his abstraction. The blind of the study window, which on the front

came down to the piazza, was pulled with a resolute hand. It swung open—the glass door was pushed in—and someone entered. It was Zoe, but so thin, worn, and shabbily dressed, that Bowen hardly knew her. There was a deadly glitter in her eyes.

“My God, woman! what do you want here?” he exclaimed.

“Nothing to *you*. I have come to see my child,” crossing rapidly to the door.

“Stop,” said Bowen, rising impetuously, while she was busy with the key which he had turned. “I cannot allow you to proceed, Madam. You have forfeited all right to enter this house, or to speak to anyone in it.”

She turned to him as he approached, and he saw the muzzle of a little weapon. “I will kill you if you meddle with me now,” she said.

Bowen sighed. “Ah,” said he, “you could hardly do me a greater service.”

By that time Zoe had the door open. She ran up the staircase to the nursery. Bowen followed more deliberately. Zoe’s tone had turned to one less desperate and more despairing.

"Oh, Mary! he doesn't know me! Eddy! don't be afraid—won't you look at Mamma? It's Mamma come back to her baby a little while!"

The child shrank. Zoe said bitterly, "The work so far is well done."

"Here, try him with this," said Bowen, advancing and taking off his watch. Zoe proffered it—but the child was looking steadily and did not notice the inducement. She laid it aside and held out her hands. The child's blank face was crossed with a gleam of recollection—he got down and tottered forward—said "Mamma," and clung to her neck.

Bowen went down to the study, but he could not compose his mind again to his duties. He felt uneasy at the situation. Here was that woman again actually under his roof! He had not the heart to send her away—indeed it would make a terrible scene in her present rebellious disposition; and yet what a position for him to be placed in if anybody who knew her should happen to get hold of it. After an hour he sent for Mary and asked whether the baby's mother was still up-stairs.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How long is she going to stay?"

"I don't know, sir. She says he mustn't forget her again. She says if she must go now, she'll take Eddy with her. Shall I take any word to her?"

"No—" Mr. Bowen had settled into resignation and calmness. "Let her alone."

The night wore on, and the sermon progressed slowly. It was only with the dawn of day that it was finished. He turned off the gas and went into the low parlor fronting on the garden, and throwing up the sash, sat down in the fresh breeze of the morning. The bells at the Church of the Crucifixion were ringing out six o'clock, and the morning sun threw its rays across the Gothic pinnacles fronting that cruciform structure, and on the luxuriant grapevines that mantled the garden wall. The breath from a bed of white and colored lilies at the window rose to his nostrils at the incoming air, and soon dispelled the giddiness consequent on his night's vigil.

Before long there were signs of life in the house. The door of the kitchen opened and

Zoe came out. She carried her hat in her hand and her shawl on her arm. It seemed quite natural to see her there, and Bowen, as he looked at her was forced to pay internal homage to her indomitable beauty. In spite of the evidences of suffering, it was all there, only more delicate and sylph like, and in sharper outlines than before. She hesitated a moment, then as he did not move, advanced and laid her arm among the lilies on the window-sill.

"I would like to ask you a question," she said.

"Allow me to ask first if you have any consideration for me?"

"The utmost," rejoined Zoe. "You fear, I suppose, that some one may pass and see me here. It's the best way to talk to you outside the house. People will think I am refused admission. That would be according to canon, and preserve you from blame."

"I think, to look at you, one must believe in lost angels," said Bowen. "How infernally you have swindled me, Zoe—does your conscience never tell you so?"

"I beg your pardon," she answered, "It was you who swindled me."

"I?"

"Yes; did you not preach in the church yonder, that the Magdalens are saints of God at his right hand? Either you meant something or you meant nothing. If you meant nothing, it was a down-right swindle, and if you meant something, then I was justified."

"It's very proper for people to repent and to be saints," said Bowen, "and to sit on the right hand of God, if they can get there. But it's rather a lack of saintly humility while on earth to marry clergymen of the church as respectable women."

"Ah! we may be saints of God, but to the dignity of clergymen's wives we are not to aspire. I understand now; but at the time it deceived me. I really thought you meant it all—that having altered my life, I was a respectable woman, and that being good enough for the kingdom of God, I was good enough for you."

"And you were judge and jury on that point so honestly."

"Did I not offer to tell you? You refused to hear—and why? You remember why! I am sorry now. I see that I should have insisted on your knowledge of everything. Then all the trouble would have been spared to you, as you would not have married me."

"I am not so sure of that," said Bowen, in a lowered and grave tone.

Zoe drew a long breath, her color had risen to her temples—she looked at him undecided and wavering for a minute—then became self-possessed.

"And when the exposure came? What would you have done?"

"I might have done a dozen things."

"You would have done precisely as you have done—abandoned me before men and violated your vows before God. It has troubled you that I am here—now I will never so trouble you again if you will let me go in again and take away my child. As your wife and his mother, you must acknowledge that I have not sinned. Once gone you can easily forget me and the ruin I have wrought."

"Take the child—what! away from me?"

"You have taken him away from me and kept him from me for three months. Now it is my turn."

"But the child must be considered, Zoe. Are you not willing to leave him for his own sake?"

"I would take him from *you* for his own sake. Which is most unfit to bring him up? you or I. I ask no other earthly privilege than to have the whole care of him. You are contented to leave him to a false and ignorant hireling like Lucy, and count her moral instruction and guardianship superior to that of his mother. You see him perhaps fifteen minutes a day or not at all. I do recognize your right to the child one-half the time, but you forbid me to see him ever. I suppose you object to racks and thumb-screws—you imagine yourself to be humane—but the torture you have inflicted on me in separating me from my own flesh and blood, I would gladly have exchanged for that of the Inquisition."

"I have been entirely justified in the opinion of women who are themselves mothers and Christians besides."

"Oh, yes! I knew all the time it was the Christians," Zoe answered, with her eyes aflame. "I knew it was they who have made me stand hours in the street watching for my little baby, whom his Christian father sent another way, lest I might see him. *Justified* by the Christians! Oh! such Christianity! It stinks in the nostrils of God."

The oath rung out round and full from the woman's lips. The scorn of her face was superba. Bowen felt powerless to utter any rebuke. Zoe drew her shawl over her shoulders to go.

"What question did you have for me?" he asked.

"I wanted to ask you and your people, does forgiveness forgive? But I won't ask it now. I see that I have misunderstood my offence. It is not so much that I did wrong, but that I tried to live differently—and did. My greatest offence was in daring to have a home and to be happy in it, in being innocent among the rest of the world, instead of going into a cell to mourn forever in sack-cloth and ashes away from all mankind."

"Wait a moment," said Bowen, as she turned away. "I acknowledge that in one point I have done wrong, and I will repair it as far as possible. Mary shall bring the baby to you every day and leave him with you half the time. Will that do?"

Tears fell from Zoe's down-cast lashes on the lilies. "Yes—and I am glad you are so far just. Will he come to-day?"

"Yes, at four o'clock, and I will send for him again in the morning."

Zoe stood irresolutely. "I have a confession to make now. You wronged me so cruelly in this matter, that I meant to retaliate in kind. I intended to sell my jewelry to-morrow, and then to take the child and go away with him."

"Well—I'll forgive you that—but don't harbor any more such wicked intentions."

Zoe bowed with a very subdued and grateful air, and with that moved to go. Bowen, yielding to a sudden impulse, took her hand, and leaned forward to kiss her. She drew back with a look that brought him to himself, and walked away rapidly, leaving him cursing

his folly, in unspeakable annoyance, both at being so rebuked and at the indiscretion itself.

He had not very long to curse, as it soon was time for early service, and his lecture came off then. He was glad that at the high ten o'clock hour Dr. McEachirn was to hold forth, for he was strangely out of sorts. As he looked at the women spangled and jeweled and bustled, powdered and perfumed, gazing up so serenely over their gently waving fans, at the pulpit, he turned away to the vision of that morning's outlaw, her shabby attire, her draggled skirts, her face like the dawn. How pure and clear and unearthly and spiritual she had seemed; and yet how human—how maternal—how resentful. His mind held distinctly every item of the picture, even to the frayed button-holes on her coarse black dress and her rumpled collar, and the golden hair that massed itself on her shoulders when she walked away. And how she had turned from him—with what a flash of the eye and rapid step. Ah! not a woman of all this well-dressed multitude, whose hands were so heavy

with jewels, could ever have framed so effectually that telling execration pronounced by this outcast, judged, condemned, yet utterly enchanting sorceress, who had gone with the opening day. Mr. Bowen knelt in the prayers, and stood in the chants, and bent in the glorias, and revered the altar when he went out, but it was all mechanical. His thoughts were far away.

That day the child went to see its mother, and that night—though not till it was fairly dark, Mr. Bowen followed the child.

He found Zoe in the front parlor of the house which was her residence. She had been busy all the morning, getting ready for the child's arrival. At first, although annoyed to find her paying him so little attention, he excused it because she was engrossed by her little guest; but when the child was rocked to sleep in her arms, there was nothing to make amends for the strict but very frigid politeness of her manner. She was so evidently willing that he should go away, that Bowen quitted the house in a tumult of chagrin.

“Hardly spoke to me—hardly looked at

me ! After such a risk as I have run in going to see her ! The ungrateful jade ! ”

On Monday Zoe bought new playthings, and worked all day on some little clothes. Four o'clock, but the child came not. It grew dark and still no baby. Mrs. Johnson offered all the consolation in her power. “ I think thy husband will bring him when it gets late enough. Zoe, thee must have patience.”

This expectation Zoe did not entertain, but just at tea-time Bowen came in with the child in his arms. “ Zoe,” he said, “ there's no more miserable being on earth than I am. Don't break my heart entirely—remember the child is not all you have in life. Lucy is dismissed, and I am going to bring him to you when Mary cannot come.”

Zoe could not refuse a welcome. She was all smiles in spite of herself. A child's high chair was at the tea-table, which waited in her room, and a third place was improvised for Bowen. It was hard to say which one of the reunited family was the happiest. There was one drawback. Zoe noticed that Bowen shunned the windows until the shades were

down, and that when there came a ring outside he was a little nervous and suspended his meal until the door was heard to close.

Still he came again, twice that week, and often through the month. It was an uneasy walk, but once there the uneasiness vanished; for while there he was secure from detection and loth to trust himself again to the possible eyes of the street. He remembered the Scripture, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant," and saw both force and beauty in the proverb.

In fact he was desperately in love again and happy nowhere else than with his wife and child. At last he grew reckless in his blessed contentment on this hidden hearth, that was so sweet a reflection of what his now dark and desolate rectory fireside once had been, came to it constantly and carelessly, and neglected business meetings about the parish in an inexplicable manner.

It was on a Sunday morning, when this state of affairs had progressed into the second month. Drs. McEachirn and Fosbrook had read the communion service, and the varie-

gated lights from the Gothic windows fell in rich colors on the surplices of Fletcher and Bowen, who were sitting together in the stalls.

"Do you know what people say now?" quoth Fletcher.

Mr. Bowen declared ignorance, but not without forebodings.

"An outrageous slander, but they will talk so! Why, they say you have been to see your wife, and in fact, that you are living with her privately. I denied it on the spot. I said it was a false and outrageous calumny."

"Very glad you did deny it," said Bowen. "I trust you always will."

"Certainly," said Fletcher, "glad I can do so on your authority. Somebody goes to see her, but I knew it could never have been you. Come, we must get the cups."

And the two reverend gentlemen hied to the opposite side of the chancel, and solemnly said: "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee" more than a hundred times over. Then Mr. Fletcher went off to his dinner and Mr. Bowen back to his study

and his conscience. He threw his hat and gloves on the table and said half aloud,

"I have lied."

And against Zoe ! against a wife who loved him better than anyone else did in the world, through time-serving fear of those whom he had already seen were ready to sacrifice him at whatever moment it should seem the most politic thing to do.

It was well for him that it had come to the issue. It forced him to analyze this fear. He began to excuse himself to his own reproving soul. He said to himself it was impossible to tell the truth—certainly the truth would have ruined him. He had lied to Fletcher because Fletcher would repeat it in good faith—he would not have minded telling Fletcher as far as Fletcher alone was concerned—nor Fosbrook, nor Dr. McEachirn. But they were all his friends. The world at large was his enemy. Well—at all events he had saved himself through the falsehood, and it was a fact that he was saved—but then at the expense of being the meanest jackass in all Christendom.

Some of the inimical vestry were to dine that day with Mr. Fletcher. Jeannette and Aurelia had extra hair to coil up for the occasion. Fletcher had brought home the news of Mr. Bowen's denial exultantly. Jeannette carried it from the cool hall up to the region of the braids and switches where was her sister. They conned it over. Jeannette said of course—she had known it was a slander all the time.

"I wonder," said Aurelia, reflectively, "if he got a divorce from that horrible woman, whether it would be a sin to marry him!"

At dinner the vestry men brought a piece of news that startled everybody's pulse. There had been an election that day for an assistant rector in the church. Dr. McEachirn had asked for it several weeks before. The vote had just been taken, and it was an absolute fact that Mr. Bowen had been elected.

Fletcher hurried off to Bowen with the news. He found that gentleman at a solitary, gloomy, and unusually late dinner-table. Mr. Bowen listened utterly astonished. He had known of the election indeed, but had not

thought of it as possessing the least connection with himself. It revealed to him that his popularity had been gradually recovering from the terrible shock of Zoe's destroyed reputation. It was true he had been elected by a majority of one only, but it was a hopeful sign. Fletcher declared that Bowen would undoubtedly yet be rector of the parish.

"When Dr. McEachirn goes to heaven, (I don't know that he ever will) you'll step into the place, naturally, Bowen. There will be a mere form of an election—a necessary form—that's all. We may count Malthaus quite dead now, thank God."

"It's inexplicable," said Bowen, "I thought I was ruined in the church."

"So we all thought, and two months ago, I should have said that the congregation, if their vote could have been taken, would not have agreed with it. But that's not so to-day. The populace fluctuates—you have half, certainly the female half, in your favor, and Dr. McEachirn, of course, throws all his influence with everybody in your cause."

"I know he did on one point."

"Yes, indeed, and now. He made a little address to the vestry in which he recommended you highly for the office."

"I did not expect it—even from him."

"There may be an explanation," said Fletcher drily.

"Please unfold it. I have no idea."

"Well, the doctor's old—don't expect to live long. He has an unmarried daughter whom he would like to see well settled. Fosbrook is a married man, and so am I."

"And what am *I* in the name of God?"

"The nearest approach to an unmarried man of any of the three! People think you'll get a divorce—seem to expect it."

"And do you imagine that they would consider it a proper thing for a divorced clergyman to marry again?"

"My dear fellow, people call your marriage null and void in the sight of God. I honestly think that if you were not to get divorced at all, you might marry Miss Belle McEachirn in the church, and her father would marry you, and all the congregation would attend the

wedding, and nobody would arrest you for bigamy either. Men that marry hell-cats are not *married*—they are only legally bound ? ”

“ My dear Fletcher ! how absurd ! ”

“ Not at all. Belle McEachirn is in love with you. Aurelia says so. ”

Mr. Bowen had the grace to blush.

“ And you’re a fool if you don’t go in for a divorce. You’ll have proof enough — people are interesting themselves to get evidence for you. They are watching the house where Mrs. Bowen lives to see who goes in. As I intimated this morning, she has a visitor. ”

At this Bowen’s color gradually sank. He closed his lips tightly, and pressed on the table the end of a pencil he contemplated till it broke. Fletcher took these for signs of natural indignation.

“ I watched the house myself one night—actually I did—Fred Jones and I. ”

“ The devil you did ! ” thought Bowen.

“ And we saw a man go in — very familiar apparently—he had a night-key. ”

“ What did he look like ? ”

“ It was very dark, and we saw only his

back, but the most rakehell subject you can conceive. Evidently a godless, worthless, unprincipled man about town."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and he stayed the Lord knows how long. We got tired of waiting. We walked up and down the sidewalk for three hours and a half, and as he didn't reappear we went away."

"Perhaps he belonged there," said Bowen, "a boarder or something."

"No, for my wife and Mrs. Fosbrook have discovered that there are no male lodgers in the house—there is only one man on the premises—Mrs. Johnson's father—very old and decrepid. This fellow was young enough, and walked as though the devil was after him. Opened the door and went through like a flash. Such a man as that is enough to ruin the reputation of a house for Mrs. Johnson, even provided she had no such person as poor Mrs. Bowen there."

Mr. Bowen's eyebrows arched a little. "What took you there, Fletcher? Had you heard anything, or did you do it merely at your own instigation?"

"Of myself—not exactly either. Somebody had it that you went there, and I thought we must upset that. I knew at once that half of it might be true; that it was somebody, we were going to make sure. If the fellow had not stayed so late we should have seen him face to face—asked him for a light or something. Just so that we could have sworn it was not you."

"And suppose your calculation had failed Fletcher, and you had met me instead of a stranger?"

"If I had," said Fletcher, very gravely, "I should never have breathed such an indiscretion on your part to a living soul! You may be very sure of that! But I should have remonstrated with you most earnestly, and I should have thought you very, very weak and very wrong; indeed, I might say, very criminal!"

Bowen was a little stirred. He shrugged his shoulders. "Wrong? Why isn't she my own lawful wife? Did I not swear before the altar of God to forsake all others, and keep only to her so long as we both live? How

could Dr. McEachirn after saying over her head that God had joined us together, marry me to any other woman while she lives?"

"Well, now, Bowen, that will do for you to say here to me, (only I hope you won't say it to anyone else) and I would respect your scruples about marrying another woman. But if you'll take my advice, you won't think of going to see her. You would simply cut your own throat. You're a young man yet—you have a long life before you. Dr. McEachirn won't live a great while, and by the time he dies, everybody will be on your side. Then there's the rectorship and twelve thousand a year! Now don't throw away that handsome and lucrative and influential position for a mess of pottage. It's very well in you to be sorry for Mrs. Bowen—very kind of you to send the child to see her, (though a great many people have demurred about that), but such a woman at the head of a parish—why look at it? think how impossible it is! Now, if you *could* marry the rector's daughter, or any girl of like position, it crushes out your past unfortunate mistake at once! People

would *have* to forget it. You are already sustained by the ladies and you will be rector as a matter of course. Had you thought of going to see Mrs. Bowen ? ”

“ Yes, I had thought of it,” said Bowen.

“ Then this is my last word. If you *must* go—if business or necessity takes you, go in broad daylight, see her on the front door step and talk to her there in the eyes of all the world, or better still, take another clergyman with you—me for instance.

Rev. Mr. Fletcher left. Somehow the atmosphere had grown warm to Bowen, and he opened all the windows in the room.

That night he did not go out—on the contrary, he saw at home several members of the congregation who had called with congratulations. The next day he was busy, and the next evening there was a reception at the rectory. Dr. McEachirn had sent a note advising his attendance, and Mr. Bowen felt that it was only a necessary recognition of the compliment of his late election to show some sign of returning animation. When he went in, the sight of Miss Belle McEachirn, in a robe of

graceful black, her gold bracelets and necklace gleaming through the sable gauze on her full neck and rounded arms, and her crimped blonde hair piled above her forehead, forced him to remember Fletcher's suggestion, and he stopped a little wickedly for a few words in defence to that memory. Miss McEachirn's good-natured self-possession and her beaming smile gave an early brightness to the evening, and after acknowledging to himself that she was a very fine girl, indeed, Bowen resigned himself strictly to the sedater side of the assemblage.

He was home late. The next morning just after he had counted out and pocketed his quarterly salary, an express wagon came to the door. The expressman inquired if this was the residence of Rev. E. C. Bowen.

Bowen who had gone to the door inquired what he had. The men had brought home a statue from a sculptor's studio. It was after a model by Mrs. Bowen. While Bowen was debating with himself what direction he should give, the man staggered in under the statue. It was the figure the model of which Zoe had

shown him on the day of their engagement. On the base was cut the inscription "ECCE FEMINA."

It went no farther than a transient stay in the hall. Bowen felt that it was not the thing to reside in that house.

"Receipt the bill here," he said, and take the statue to this address, handing the messenger a card. "Leave it there for Mrs. Bowen."

The wagon rattled away with the statue. Bowen brushed his hat and coat and walked leisurely after it. At ten o'clock and in broad daylight, he stood on Mrs. Johnson's door-step. The night-key which usually admitted him was in his watch pocket, but Bowen restrained his hand and rang the bell.

Zoe sat in the sunny parlor close at the front window busy with her needle. The baby was sleeping in the shaded cradle near her. She was dressed rather austere in a plain black jacket and walking skirt, and her hair was braided behind each ear. There was a hectic glow on her cheeks, and Bowen felt instantly an unusual gravity in her manner.

"I am glad you came to-day," she said, "though I was far from expecting you at this hour. I wanted to talk to you particularly."

Bowen was directly opposite the recently arrived piece of statuary. He fixed his eyes on it and listened. Zoe then proceeded to say that she was very deeply dissatisfied with the way in which they had been recently associating. Either Mr. Bowen was doing a wrong to the church or to her.

"You are considerate towards the church to give it a place in the argument," returned Bowen.

"I have undoubtedly as little respect for the church as the church has for me," Zoe rejoined; "nevertheless that does not affect your duties towards the body to which you publicly belong. You are there with certain understandings—you occupy a position which would be seriously affected if your visits to me were known."

"But I don't feel that to be proper or just, Zoe," said Bowen. "You are my wife before God and man."

"Then *say so* before God and man. Don't

be bold before God and ashamed before man. If you cannot tell the church publicly that it is wrong, and suffer its outlawry, you should conform to what it expects of you. I have felt for a long time that I was wrong not to say this, and have asked myself where it will all end."

"I do not acknowledge it to be any one's affair," said Bowen.

"But your actions acknowledge it."

"Well certainly—it would hardly do to have it known."

Zoe struggled with emotion

"Look at it a moment," she said. "Granted that once I stole a loaf of bread. Well—now I wish to be honest! I *am* honest! Is it right that my husband should force me to skulk like a thief because it will not do to have it known that he associates with one who is under condemnation?"

"You once asked me to go and take a little place in the country," said Bowen. "Do you remember it?"

"Yes, I remember it," and the color overspread her face. "Why—do you wish to go?"

Bowen was silent.

"I will answer for you," said Zoe. "No—I would not myself consent to it unless you were to see the solid value of such a life, and to urge it with your whole heart. But you are too worldly for that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that your heart is in the world—its honors and its good opinion."

"The *world*."

"Well—call it the church, then—but it's the world all the same. You preach to Mammon worshippers, and preach to suit them. You believe in their creed. How does it save you to call your God Jesus, while you see in his temple the very creatures he denounced—and they are unrebuked?"

"Well, Zoe, what do you want to do?"

Zoe trembled a little.

"Not to see you again, Mr. Bowen, until one of two things shall happen. Either till your church learns the divine rights of a wife and mother, from whatever misery she might have sprung; or until *you* are converted out of the church and theology and worldly prudence,

into true manliness and Christianity. So help me God, I will never see you again till that hour comes—and I think it will never come on this side the grave.”

Bowen went to the mantel and rested his head on his hand with his shoulder toward Zoe.

“And we cannot part too soon,” said she. “Suppose some one were to ask you if you had been here? You would be ‘ruined,’ as the world terms it; and it is only accident that has saved you from the question.”

At this Bowen winced in the depths of his soul.

“I feel,” he observed, “that it is all very unfortunate, but I cannot really see how, in coming here, I have sinned.”

“By secrecy. That’s the sin. Separation will not afflict us so much as meeting this way will demoralize us. Yes—we must part—we owe it to ourselves and honesty—and the sooner the better.”

Bowen felt that Zoe was right, and he bowed assent. But she saw by the pallor of his face

when he turned again, that he felt it with pain, and his voice had grown husky.

"You will still live here? I can write to you occasionally?"

"No—the world demands an utter renunciation. I must be to you like one dead hereafter. But there is something else. I have a favor to ask. Last summer I was in the country with the baby—he ought to go again. Mrs. Johnson leaves this house next week in charge of her daughter and goes to her sister's, a little out of town. I would like to take Eddy and accompany her. We shall return in three months. Are you willing?"

"What! to be robbed of wife and child both at one stroke? And if I consent, how can you reconcile that proceeding to honesty?"

"Let it be known," said Zoe. "It is impossible to do otherwise. And allow me to assure you that the church cannot resent your sending the child out of town with me so much as it would resent your visits to me here."

This Bowen felt to be true.

"The child can go with you," he said. "How soon?"

"To-day. I will lose no time. There is one thing more. I wish to send my jewel-casket back to you. As I have no daughter I would like you to keep it as a gift from me to Eddy when he is grown. I sold the earrings that you hated so, but nothing else."

Bowen here mentioned the result of the recent election. Zoe looked astonished.

"Is it possible! I express surprise because I must tell you what you have not known before—there is a rumor in circulation that you have been here. Two persons called last week to question Mrs. Johnson. She told me so this morning."

"Confound the meddling busy-bodies. What did she say?"

"She refused to answer. But if the report had become a certainty you would not have received such a promotion. I now perceive that it could not have gained credence any where. It is well for your sake. Now be thankful that you are warned in time."

It was a very quiet parting, but Bowen went home in a wretched state of mind indeed. Mary came soon with the casket of jewels, and

a parcel of books. She asked permission to go with Mrs. Bowen and the baby, and it was accorded.

She departed in the afternoon. Bowen had locked away the diamonds and looked over the books. They were emanations from the radical press, many of them purely scientific. Zoe had collected what he thought a censurable miscellany in her isolation. He opened one and got interested, and read on because he was interested. The book was one he had seen before and quite despised, but he discovered in the course of an hour that there was more truth in it than he had expected to come out of Nazareth.

The following day he left town to see his widowed aunt and request her to take charge of his lonely household. He could not leave it longer without a mistress, especially as it might be necessary for him to keep open house again. This Fletcher commended as a very wise step, and the arrival of the lady completed his satisfaction.

The child's departure with its mother was speedily known about the parish ; but, as Mr.

Fletcher soon discovered, it was a step forgiven to Mr. Bowen by all the ladies, in consideration of the well-known fact that Mrs. Bowen's health had failed greatly, and that it was highly probable this would be her last summer. Much patience could be felt for a woman who promised to be so shortly out of everybody's way. But this state of affairs Bowen himself did not realize. He had seen Zoe during the hours that that most insidious of all diseases, consumption, left its lightest trace, and that he was not aware of her illness, was something which the congregation did not suspect.

The summer wore away. It was for Bowen the saddest season of his life. He stayed closely in town while the other clergy and the bulk of the congregation had gone to their various summer haunts, and followed the usual routine of services, generally with an audience of strangers, for many of the neighboring churches were absolutely closed. He missed the child's presence in the house, and his occasional letters to Zoe were like epistles written to the dead, for they brought no answer.

Of her return to the city, in October, he was

first made aware by the appearance of Mary with the baby on the familiar threshold.

The child was ruddy and strong, and Bowen rejoiced in his improvement. Mary, when questioned, said that Mrs. Bowen was well as usual, and further than that he did not ask. Things returned to their old order. Mary daily took the child to Mrs. Johnson's, and it seemed always so to happen that whenever the weather was wet or severely cold the baby was on his mother's side of the gulf, and in reality it was to his father that he made the daily call.

But by this time the man had grown resigned to the situation. Indeed he was now very busy. A double responsibility was thrown into his hands by the illness of Dr. McEachirn, and his death, which soon followed, was an event of too great importance to leave Mr. Bowen or his reverend *confreres* time to think of the living.

There was a great funeral of course—a thronged church and hundreds unable to enter. The Bishop preached the sermon, which did due honor to the great merits of the deceased

and the special graces with which he had been endowed both by nature and by Providence. His learning, his humility, his gentle, affectionate and retiring nature, were done full justice to. Those who knew Dr. McEachirn well, shed tears at the rehearsal—they recognized the side of his character that had been presented. Its more human aspect was forgotten then.

The week of excitement having passed by, the next thing was the election of a successor. Everybody said, "Mr. Bowen." Some said, "Bowen, of course." Many more said, "It might be Mr. Bowen if—." More than all were those who said, "Mr. Bowen, I hope, but I fear not. He is in *such* an unfortunate position!"

Mr. Bowen himself was not sanguine. There had been no anticipation to temper his unaffected regret at the loss of such a friend as he had had in the late rector. To the more hopeful Fletcher he expressed himself thus: "Dr. McEachirn died five years too soon for *me*, Fletcher. I do not expect under the circumstances to win the election."

Fletcher, whose zeal for Bowen grew warm as the terrible vision of Malthaus at the head of the parish grew imminent as the alternative, canvassed with assiduity for his friend, and with increasing earnestness as the hour approached.

It wanted one week of the election. The vestry had appointed the next Monday evening for their final conclave. Mr. Bowen was in the church examining into the merits of new patterns in candlesticks, which were to appear for the first time in silver and gold among the Easter adornments. Fletcher came in unusually excited and in frantic haste. He took Mr. Bowen off from a discussion with the senior warden.

"Bowen, I have news for you. You are a free man again."

"Good heavens. Is Zoe dead?"

"No—not yet. They say she is dying, but that is doubtful. But aside from that you are liberated. She has another child born within the week. Mrs. Fletcher had it from Susan Rogers."

Bowen stood as though a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet.

"See how the wicked destroy themselves," said Fletcher enthusiastically. "Here this woman has been followed and watched and reported upon for months all to no purpose. Providence comes in to detect guilt when all other means fail."

Bowen thought no more about the candlesticks, but left the vestry to settle the patterns among themselves.

It was well toward sunset. He hurried to his study, opened his desk and took out a little night-key locked up for many months—then he hurried off to Mrs. Johnson's. That venerable female was just lighting up the hall.

"How is Zoe?" he asked.

"Zoe will suffer very little more in this world," replied Mrs. Johnson. "Dr. Kass brought two physicians here to-day and none of them give us any hope. Dr. Kass wanted thee to feel satisfied with his efforts. It is the same room. She will be glad to see thee."

The interview between the dying woman and her husband lasted over two hours. It

was the same Zoe, altered only as the disease and mental suffering of a year had done their work. But the eye and smile betokened an unaltered soul.

When he left he said to Mrs. Johnson that he would return in the morning.

There were early prayers to be read. This was his duty, as Fosbrook was ill and Fletcher away. When Bowen returned to the house he found Mary crying in the hall. She handed him a card, on which was written : "Mrs. Bowen died at six this morning. With sympathy yours, Julian Kass."

With a face as white as ashes Bowen read this note, then locked himself into the study. Meantime the news was flying over the parish. Fletcher drove in from the country at noon. He had expected it.

"It has happened just at the right time for Bowen?" said he. "Now if that woman could be buried to-day, and he would engage himself to-morrow to Belle McEachirn, and announce it on Sunday, he would go into the rector's shoes on Monday as surely as the sun rises."

When Fletcher called to see Bowen he found that gentleman with Dr. Kass, who was arranging for the burial. He felt delicate about saying much before a third party.

"Shall you *go* to this funeral?" he asked of Bowen.

"It is to be from this house."

"That's impolitic, Bowen. Better let it come off quietly at the Quaker's, and let me or somebody go down in gown and bands and read the service."

"That would not be in accordance with Mrs. Bowen's wishes," pronounced Dr. Kass. "She gave me directions before seeing her husband."

Fletcher had interrupted a conversation between Bowen and the physician. Dr. Kass could only add a few words at the front door, to which Bowen accompanied him.

"I advise you strongly against it. You would only ruin yourself forever and do the dead no earthly good."

The next news was that Zoe's youngest born was to be adopted by Mr. Bowen and educated with the other child. At first Fletcher was

daunted by what he feared was an evil measure, but he soon had his cue from the prominent ladies of the congregation.

"It's magnanimous! that's the word exactly. Bowen's treatment of that poor wretch has been magnanimous all the way through, only unfortunately thrown away on such a subject."

And so well did Mr. Fletcher convey this opinion about the congregation, that the word "magnanimous" went home in a hundred mouths after evening service.

The notes of the last chant had died away, and the choir, practising for the Easter services, had gone from the organ loft. As the last member of that quartette was quitting the church he perceived one of the clergy enter through the vestry room. It was Mr. Bowen. He crossed through the eastern aisle, and stood before the altar. The witness saw him kneel, and quietly retired.

The man on his knees gazed long at the altar, at the dim outline of the Easter candles by the Bishop's chair, at the painting of the triple crucifixion overhanging all and lit by the

rays of the moon. Somehow this atmosphere he had breathed so many years in contentment had grown stifling, and a flame that once glowed here with celestial brightness, had turned to ashes. In that hour the veil fell from his eyes! He looked beyond the altar to a God so little known before—the God of Truth and Justice, by Christ revealed—by Paul declared, and in the contemplation, high as the stars and wide as the universe, he felt like one who, near the mouth of a narrow river, looks out on the high seas. One of those struggles which end only with the soul's life or death was going on within him, and it was in vain to linger in this temple of the world for aid.

He rose with a sigh and went back to his study and his own reflections. Here he paced the floor hour after hour, and the angel struggled with the devil till the night was gone.

He had said to Zoe in her last hours: "Live for my sake and the children's! Hereafter I will live for you."

And she had answered: "Hereafter you can live for something better than for me—justice."

And these words rang continually on the divine side of his human soul.

And on the other side spoke the voice of the world strongly against it. "You would only ruin yourself forever and do the dead no earthly good."

The next morning the congregation had for a topic of discussion the following notice in the death column of a daily paper :

"March 21st., Zoe L. Bowen."

"No funeral services. Interment from the residence of Rev. Edwin C. Bowen, to-day at one o'clock."

Not one exclaimed "Heathenism." Nearly everybody considered it a very proper thing. The ladies thought it very evident that Mrs. Bowen had died as she had lived, impenitent and contumacious. Mr. Bowen had treated her too nobly to allow any one to suppose he would not have added Christian burial to the list of his mercies, had rubrical law permitted him to do so without absolute sacrilege.

That morning, after service, Messrs. Fosbrook and Fletcher, with several of the vestry, met in Mr. Bowen's parlor. That gentleman

evidently had not slept. They all proceeded to Mrs. Johnson's in a body. Fletcher holding Bowen's arm, dilated all the way on his entire satisfaction with the different denouements.

"Get this business over and the next thing is your election. Malthaus won't bother us on the vestry, for he has had a quarrel with his uncle here who has just told me he shall vote for you. Malthaus is sick in bed about it. You are as good as elected at this moment. Everybody cries up your mercy to this woman. They say she ought to feel it in her grave."

Bowen did not reply. They reached the door of Mrs. Johnson's house, and he led the way in. The parlors were dark as the shutters were closed. Mrs. Johnson sat near the door with an open Bible.

The close room was fragrant with flowers. They were piled over the coffin where Zoe's white features were visible in the repose of death. The statue, with its thorny coronet and conspicuous label, stood out in bold relief from the curtains. In the little cradle where Eddy had so often lain was a sleeping infant,

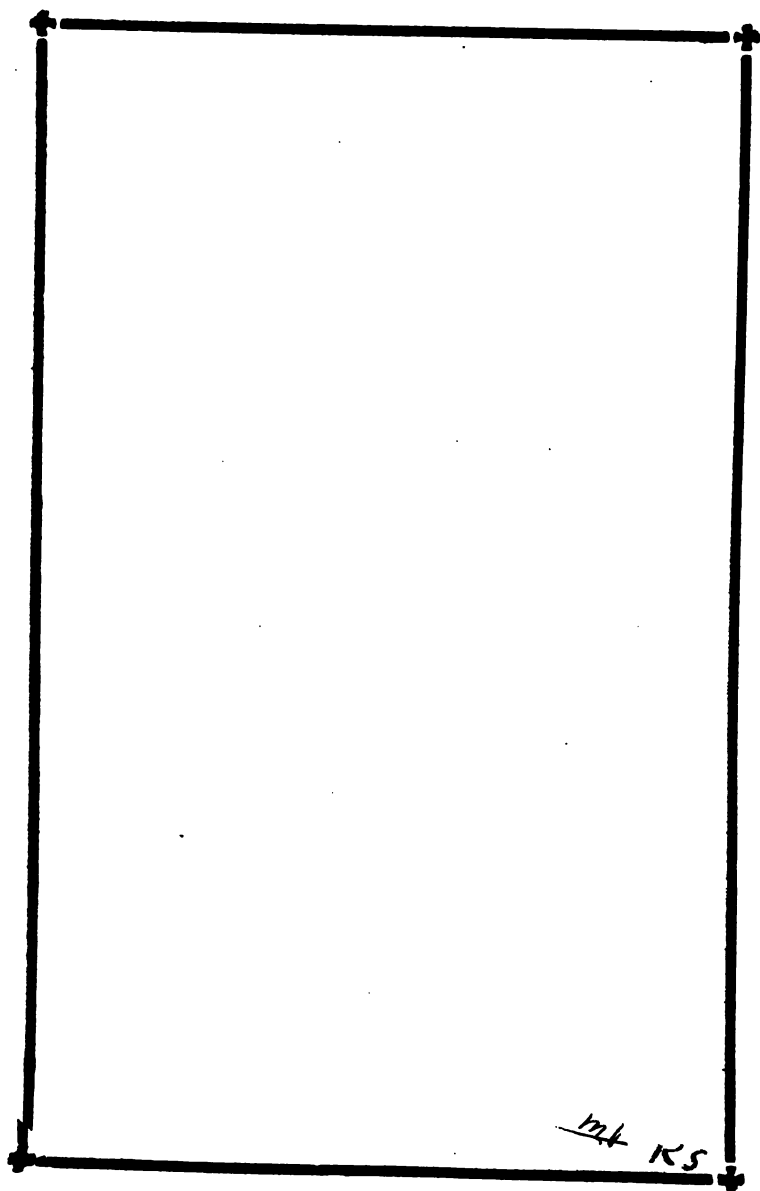
its little hands closed each side of its unconscious face.

"The flowers came as thee said," remarked Mrs. Johnson. "I thought we would put some of the sweetest of those white roses in the coffin."

"No," said Bowen, "there is nothing sweeter than her face."

The child stirred and gave an uneasy little moan. Bowen took up the infant in his arms, solemnly, as he had taken many another at the baptismal font. The rectorship, and twelve thousand a year, and the honors of the great church at large, flitted before the man's eyes, only to perish into nothingness before the face of that absolute truth whose disciple he that day became. As he uttered the next words which sealed his sentence, he felt that he was exchanging something very small for something very great.

"I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO BELIEVE THAT THE WOMAN BEFORE YOU IS OTHER THAN INNOCENT. GENTLEMEN, THIS CHILD IS MINE."









NOV - 3 (30)



